

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



## Annual Report

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2020-2021

Although drawing to some extent on the reports received from all of the Bahá'í institutions and agencies in the United Kingdom, this Annual Report of the National Spiritual Assembly is not able to present all of their work in detail. Their full reports are available online, here:  
<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1iDZiSk9Ta-piErz6FDwV3Tnzf-iUkO69?usp=sharing>

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# 1. Introduction

For the past quarter of a century, the entire Bahá'í world has focused its attention on one single aim: “advancing the process of entry by troops and on its systematic acceleration.” We have now arrived at the conclusion of this remarkable series of Plans, the record of which is yet to be written. What history will surely note, however, is the way in which the people of Bahá—guided by the Universal House of Justice—maintained a singular focus on this one aim, and did so with such a spirit of devotion to the centre of the Cause. There have indeed been many challenges, yet the transformation that has occurred has been astonishing, not least of which is the new culture that emerged within the Bahá'í community: one that is outwardly oriented, engaged in a process of learning, committed to the capacity building of its members and the empowerment of their friends, families, neighbours and colleagues, all powered by the engine of the training institute process, an instrument of limitless potentiality. This theme will no doubt be revisited in the months and years to come. For the time being, this Annual Report surveys the final year of this 25-year period.

What an extraordinary twelve months it has been! The National Spiritual Assembly has been deeply moved by the response of the United Kingdom Bahá'í community to the global health crisis, throughout which our focus on the advancement of the Five Year Plan never wavered. Individuals, communities and institutions responded immediately to ensure that community life not only continued but that its activities and the numbers of its participants increased. Institutions responded as never before to the exigencies of their communities and attention was paid to the needs of all. Our capacity to reach out to others and to invite them to activities was strengthened. Engagement in the courses of the training institute multiplied and deepened. In short, the capacity of the community to advance the process of entry by troops at all levels increased, and the spiritual health of the community was preserved and bolstered. In clearly discernible ways, clusters have advanced and goals have been achieved. Happily, the Universal House of Justice has gifted us with a further twelve month period—the One Year Plan—to achieve further goals that have yet to be accomplished.



September 2020 saw the passing of three luminaries who made an indelible mark on the world. In its message announcing the death of Farzam Arbab (top left), former member of the Universal House of Justice, the Supreme Body wrote that he “*recognized that the verities contained in the Bahá'í writings concerning spiritual and social transformation and the entry into the Faith of the masses of humanity demanded persistent effort to learn how to bring them about; the investment of his whole being in this great enterprise was complete and constant.*” Douglas Martin (centre left), another former member of the House of Justice, passed away three days later, a man of “*scintillating intellect and uncommon grasp of the grand forces of history, combined with ... formidable powers of expression.*” On 24 September, the passing of Violette Haake (bottom left), a former member of the International Teaching Centre, was also announced. For those who knew her, these words of the House of Justice rang true: “*Violette possessed a character that blended extraordinary resilience, steadfastness, and inner strength with unflinching kindness, a nurturing instinct, and true joy. To the last, hers was a life devoted to the service of the Lord.*”

The guidance of the Universal House of Justice, which is quoted extensively in the first section of this report, directed our work at critical moments



throughout the year, and were a source of comfort, hope and clarity for every believer. These messages enabled the community to maintain its focus and to respond, at so many levels—and in accordance with its capacity—to the needs of society during such a perilous time. Among the significant communications received during the year were:

Riḍván 2020	To the Bahá'ís of the World
9 May 2020	To all National Spiritual Assemblies, regarding the global health crisis
29 October 2020	To the Bahá'ís of the World, announcing the appointment of Counsellors
25 November 2020	To the Bahá'ís of the World, on the Day of the Covenant
10 February 2021	Guidance on Bahá'í activities online
21 February 2021	Latest developments in the construction of the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
2 April 2021	Completion of the conservation work on the House of 'Abbúd

Additionally, three letters were received calling for the United Kingdom to contribute financial resources to projects in Ghana, Egypt and the Democratic Republic of the Congo as part of the International Financial Collaboration Goals. Highly valuable new compilations, *Social Action* and *The Universal House of Justice*, were also issued, along with 26 newly-translated prayers of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The bulletins and updates from the *Bahá'í World News Service* [BWNS] kept the community fully informed of the construction works on the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the emerging local and national Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs in those communities around the world that are at the frontiers of learning. BWNS articles on national Bahá'í communities' participation in social action and the discourses of their societies, as well as their often heroic services to their communities during the pandemic, have been a useful and deeply appreciated source of insight and inspiration.



Some of the extraordinary progress that has been made on the construction of the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá (design, top left) in the past year, despite the various restrictions and limitations caused by the global health crisis.

Every five years on the Day of the Covenant, the members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors are appointed by the Universal House of Justice. Thus, on 25 November 2020, a new term commenced. For Europe, the following 12 Counsellors were appointed to serve: Raffaella Capozzi Gubinelli, Aisté Elíjio, Orlando Ravelo Hernández, Varqá Khadem, Shirin Youssefian Maanian, Sabà Mazza, Veranika Medvedeva, Hedyeh Nadafi-Stoffel, Yevgeniya Poluektova, Mehdi Rezvan, Amir Saberín (Trustee of the Continental Fund), and Paul Verheij.

The National Spiritual Assembly looks forward immensely to collaborating ever more deeply with the Institution of the Counsellors and, in particular, to working closely with Dr. Varqá Khadem with whom a warm and dynamic relationship has already begun.

On behalf of the entire Bahá'í community of the UK, the National Assembly wishes to express its profound gratitude to Dr. Shirin Fozdar-Forouði for her constant, wise counsel and encouragement throughout the 17 years she served as a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors. Always strongly rooted in the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, Shirin guided this community, its institutions and agencies in their efforts to make a significant advance in the process of entry by troops, the overarching objective of the series of Plans during which she served. Her care and love for every member of the community and her sacrificial services have been an inspiration to all. We also wish to convey our deepest appreciation to Shirin's husband Payam, and their children, who so selflessly supported her during this period of intense service.

Twenty-one years ago, at Ridván 2000, as the 20<sup>th</sup> century drew to a close and we embarked on a Twelve Month Plan, the House of Justice informed the Bahá'ís of the World that we had come “*to a bridge between times...to which we shall never return.*” Since that moment, the world—and the entire culture and orientation of the global Bahá'í community—has transformed beyond anything anyone might have imagined at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Now, in the approaching One Year Plan, the House of Justice is calling upon us to cultivate “*the conditions necessary for welcoming larger and larger numbers of souls into the embrace of a community recognized for its fortitude and outward-looking orientation.*” The work immediately ahead is clear: every community “*must draw on whatever untapped potential it may possess and seek to overcome any obstacles that are impeding its growth, thereby preparing it for the demands to come.*” In the coming year, our efforts “*to befittingly commemorate the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and to honour the Day of the Covenant ... will provide the impetus needed to launch the succeeding stage in God’s Minor Plan, even as Providence propels the unfoldment of His Major Plan in accordance with His incontestable decree.*” The duration of the Nine Year Plan which is to follow the One Year Plan “*already gives an unmistakable indication of the expansive prospect it will present,*” as the Bahá'í community is carried forward by its loving Supreme Body through a series of Plans that will take us into the next Bahá'í century.

There is no doubt that “*the decades ahead are set to bring with them challenges among the most daunting that the human family has ever had to face.*” With profound humility, and fully conscious of the weighty responsibilities it has to shoulder, the National Assembly is committed to carrying out its work with increasing maturity, ever reliant on those “*spiritual forces that are available to every confirmed believer and which must be marshalled at the hour of need. It is these forces which endow the community with resilience, ensure its integrity, and keep it focused on its divine mission to serve humanity and elevate its vision of the future.*”



## 2. Advancing the process of entry by troops

### 2.1 A flow of guidance from the Universal House of Justice



While the global health pandemic radically altered the environment within which the believers in the United Kingdom engaged in advancing the Five Year Plan, there was not one moment when the community was without the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. Given the fundamental importance of three of the Supreme Body's messages in shaping the character and manner of our response to the crisis, we share extracts from them in this report. Just a few days before the UK went into lockdown on 23 March 2020, the Naw-Rúz 177 message was received:

*At a time of another crisis, 'Abdu'l-Bahá offered these words of counsel: "In a day such as this, when the tempests of trials and tribulations have encompassed the world, and fear and trembling have agitated the planet, ye must rise above the horizon of firmness and steadfastness with illumined faces and radiant brows in such wise that, God willing, the gloom of fear and consternation may be entirely obliterated, and the light of assurance may dawn above the manifest horizon and shine resplendently." The world stands more and more in need of the hope and the strength of spirit that faith imparts. Beloved friends, you have of course long been occupied with the work of nurturing within groups of souls precisely the attributes that are required at this time: unity and fellow feeling, knowledge and understanding, a spirit of collective worship and common endeavour. Indeed, we have been struck by how efforts to reinforce these attributes have made communities especially resilient, even when faced with conditions that have necessarily limited their activities. Though having to adapt to new circumstances, the believers have used creative means to strengthen bonds of friendship, and to foster among themselves and those known to them spiritual consciousness and qualities of tranquillity, confidence, and reliance on God. The elevated conversations that have occurred as a result, whether remotely or in person, have been a source of comfort and inspiration to many. Such efforts on your part provide a valuable service at this hour when many souls are perplexed and dismayed, unsure of what will be. However difficult matters are at present, and however close to the limits of their endurance some sections of societies are brought, humanity will ultimately pass through this ordeal, and it will emerge on the other side with greater insight and with a deeper appreciation of its inherent oneness and interdependence.*



A further letter, addressed to all National Spiritual Assemblies, was received on 9 May 2020, which set out how—in light of the present circumstances—the Bahá’í community needed to adjust its efforts to advance the Five Year Plan:

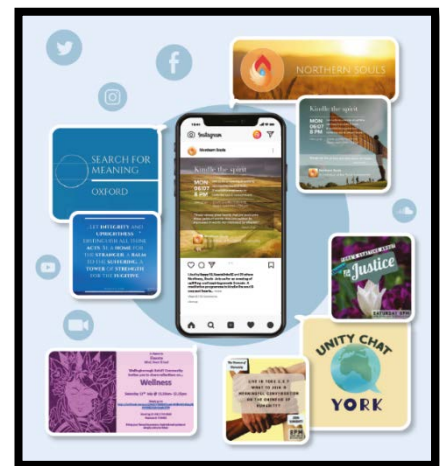
*Your efforts to stimulate the advancement of the Plan in its final months will inevitably be shaped by your pressing responsibility to guide the friends in their response to an evolving global crisis.*

...

*Much, then, has been accomplished, and this is a clear indicator of the strength and confidence of the Bahá’í community. But, as you already appreciate, the current crisis has altered the context in which the Plan is being pursued. We have been impressed by how many communities have taken great strides in adapting to this new reality. Far from viewing the present period as simply a hiatus to be endured with patience, they have recognized that the state of the world has made the need to render meaningful service to humanity more urgent. Naturally, the activities undertaken must suit the prevailing conditions, but there should be no doubt that this is a time for noble aims, high resolve, and intense endeavour. As is well known, the activities of the Plan are intended to cultivate a thriving community spirit, through which resilience to mighty challenges is also strengthened. Educational efforts aim to raise up a growing number of souls who can contribute to the spiritual and material well-being of a community; devotional meetings nurture the spirit of service as it blossoms, rooting it in a culture of collective worship. In short, the promotion of the Plan implies building capacity to walk the path of service in every time and season—which must surely include moments of acute peril in the life of humanity, such as now. It is essential, then, that the steps being taken to learn how to apply the Plan’s framework for action to the current circumstances of the world continue in earnest; in all likelihood, the global health crisis will have a direct impact on Baha’i activities, to a greater or lesser degree, for months or even years, and the task of adapting to the situation cannot be postponed. ...*

*However, while certain possibilities have been temporarily closed, others have opened up, and new means have emerged for strengthening existing patterns of activity. Flexibility has proven to be an asset, but so has vigilance in ensuring that the primarily local character of community activities is not diluted; efforts to nurture flourishing communities within neighbourhoods and villages and across clusters must continue. In some cases, present conditions have created unexpected opportunities for widening community participation in devotional meetings and study circles, conducted with safety in mind. ... The coming One Year Plan could afford an opportunity to fulfil any goals or objectives that may in the end remain out of reach during the present Plan.*

*As you are aware, there is considerable unevenness in the ways that different societies are coping with the difficulties arising from this crisis; consequently, the challenges that confront different National Assemblies are not the same. And these challenges will change over time. This will call for tremendous agility as local, regional, and national institutions seek to read their reality and stay alert to new*



Examples of some of the “creative means” that UK Bahá’ís deployed during lockdown to “strengthen bonds of friendship, and to foster among themselves and those known to them spiritual consciousness and qualities of tranquillity, confidence, and reliance on God.”



*developments ... But in every place, the friends will need clear and timely guidance; special attention must be given to those who are most at risk from the virus itself, or from the economic impact of its spread; and creative approaches will be required to sustain the collective spirit of the community during difficult times. Networks of various kinds comprising families, neighbouring households, or other groupings are offering valuable support to many; you should be confident in the resourcefulness of your communities, and seek to draw on their talents and energies to the fullest. ... Local Spiritual Assemblies in particular should consider what means might be within their power to prevent, relieve, or mitigate suffering in the wider society of which they are an integral part.*

*... The individual, the community, and the institutions of the Faith—inseparable protagonists in the advancement of civilization—are in a position to demonstrate the distinctive features of the Bahá'í way of life, characterized by increased maturity in the discharge of their responsibilities and in their relationships with each other. They are summoned to a fuller expression of the Faith's society-building powers.... At a time when the urgency of attaining higher levels of unity, founded on the incontestable truth of humanity's oneness, is becoming apparent to larger and larger numbers, society stands in need of clear voices that can articulate the spiritual principles that underlie such an aspiration.*

This remarkable letter closed with the following embrace:

*Not a moment passes when you are not in our thoughts. All our trust and confidence in your capacity to face this challenge comes from our knowledge that your ultimate supporter and helper is the Abhá Beauty Himself. In our entreaties at the Sacred Threshold, we implore Him to make you pure channels for the flow of His grace to humankind.*

Another seminal letter was addressed to the Bahá'ís of the World on 25 November 2020. It contained the following paragraph that guided our efforts through the final months of the year, and which will continue to do so during the forthcoming One Year Plan:

*It is against this background of furious storms lashing humanity that the ark of the Cause is about to embark upon a series of Plans that will carry it into the third century of the Bahá'í Era and significantly strengthen the Bahá'í community's capacity for realizing the society-building powers of the Faith. As you are aware, the first Plan to commence this new series will last but one year. In places where circumstances prevent national communities from establishing as many intensive programmes of growth before Riqdán 2021 as they intended, these twelve months will extend the time available to them to do so. Meanwhile, wherever the process of growth has already been intensified, the year will be an opportunity to consolidate the achievements made during the current Plan, while cultivating the conditions necessary for welcoming larger and larger numbers of souls into the embrace of a community recognized for its fortitude and outward-looking orientation. At the national, regional, and cluster levels, we look to communities of proven strength to help those in which less experience has accrued. For it is within the context of a flourishing community, especially a centre of intense activity in a village or neighbourhood, and when each element of the Plan's framework is given the attention it requires, that those elements most visibly cohere and connect, multiplying the community's powers in the field of action.*



## 2.2 Objectives of the Five Year Plan

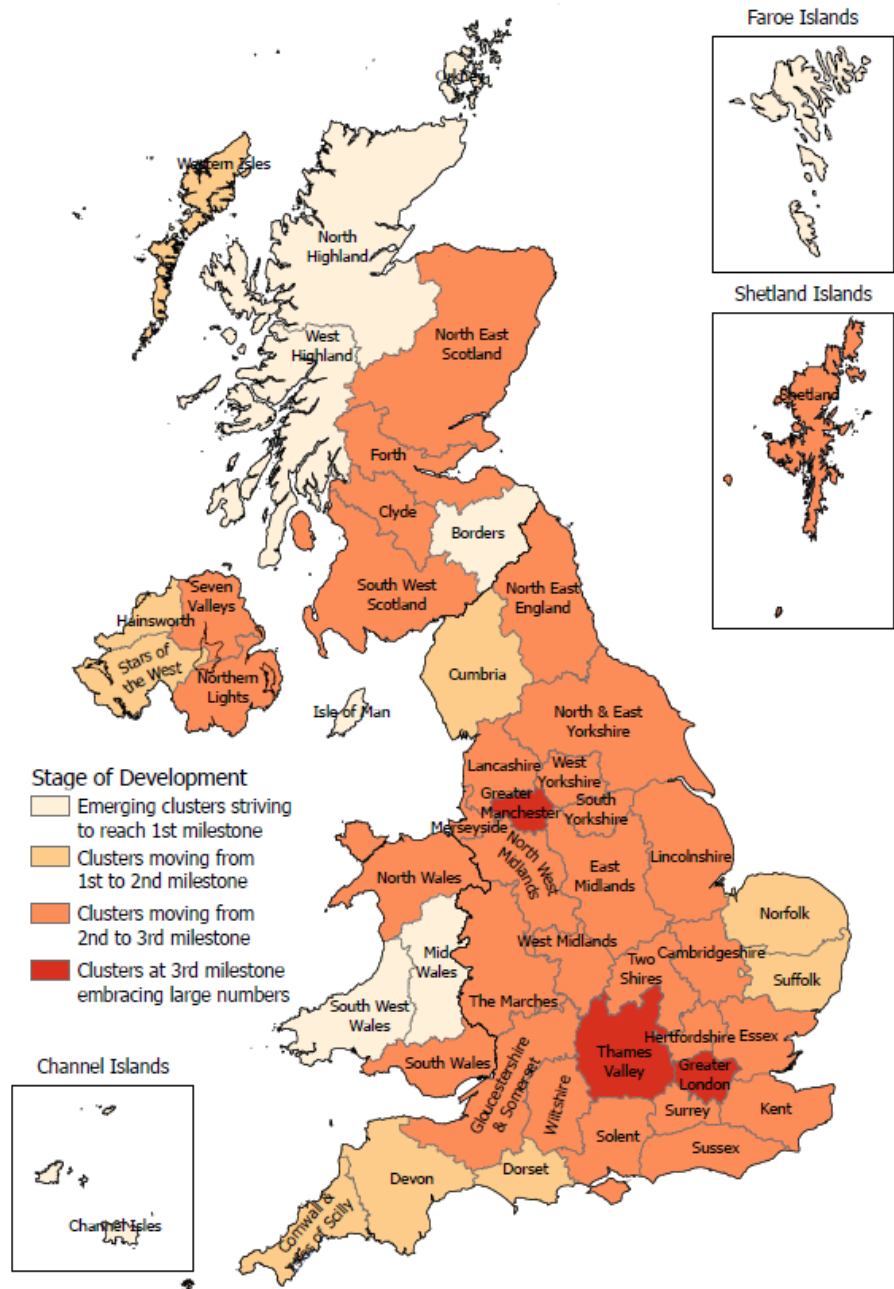
The objective of the Five Year Plan now ending has been for each of the 51 clusters in the United Kingdom and the Faroe Islands to be strengthened, and thus advance along the continuum of development. In particular, the Universal House of Justice set before the Bahá'í world the formidable task of raising the “number of clusters where a programme of growth has become intensive to 5,000 by Ridván 2021.”

In the UK, our aim was to contribute 12 clusters to this number, from those which had passed the first milestone. At the time of writing, four of these clusters have passed the second milestone: **Lincolnshire, South West Scotland, Solent, and North and East Yorkshire.**

Throughout the Plan, the community has consistently striven to advance each cluster towards and beyond its next milestone, by fostering the flow of an increasing number of individuals through the sequence of courses and into the field of service. This section of the Annual Report looks at the efforts made across the country to advance each of these two essential movements: the movement of clusters and the strengthening of the training institute.

## 2.3 Capacity building

Capacity building is at the heart of every effort to advance each cluster. As mentioned above, such an advancement can be conceived in terms of two complementary, reinforcing movements: the steady flow of individuals through the sequence of institute courses, and the movement of



Stages of development of the clusters in the UK at the conclusion of the Five Year Plan

clusters from one stage of development to the next. Much was learnt this year about advancing each of these in terms of capacity building.

*- Fostering a steady flow of individuals into the sequence of courses.*

Almost every study circle took place online during the year. Remarkably, more than 2,500 courses taken by individuals were completed during the year, of which just over half were from the higher sequence of courses (Ruhi Books 8 to 14). This upsurge in the number of study circles and participants is ongoing, as shown in the table for Study Circles in Progress (below). The number of friends of the Faith joining has also swelled.

<b>Study Circles in progress</b>			
	<b>No. of Study Circles</b>	<b>Total no. of participants</b>	<b>Estimated no. of friends of the Faith</b>
<b>Oct 2019</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>1017</b>	<b>373</b>
<b>Apr 2020</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>1254</b>	<b>359</b>
<b>Mar 2021</b>	<b>489</b>	<b>1822</b>	<b>522</b>
<b>% change 11 months</b>	<b>36.2%</b>	<b>45.3%</b>	<b>45.4%</b>

The increase both in the number of study circles and those participating meant that attention had to be given to increasing the number of tutors and raising the capacity of existing ones. With larger study circles taking place online—and the fact that courses were being completed more quickly—tutors gained experience more rapidly. Training institutes systematically identified those who had tutored or were tutoring, or had completed Ruhi Book 7: *Walking Together on a Path of Service*, inviting them to join online reflection spaces with others to learn how to tutor more effectively. What came to the fore in such conversations, perhaps as never before, was that the purpose of the institute courses is to raise capacity in the participants to carry out acts of service, and the vital role that tutors have to play in realising this purpose. This has been an important development, bringing to life passages such as this from the Ridván 2010 message of the House of Justice:

*Much will fall on those who serve as tutors in this respect. Theirs will be the challenge to provide the environment that is envisioned in the institute courses, an environment conducive to the spiritual empowerment of individuals, who will come to see themselves as active agents of their own learning, as protagonists of a constant effort to apply knowledge to effect individual and collective transformation. Failing this, no matter how many study circles are formed in a cluster, the force necessary to propel change will not be generated. ...*

*The capabilities of a tutor develop progressively as an individual enters the field of action and assists others in contributing to the aim of the present series of global Plans, through study of the sequence of courses and implementation of their practical component. And as men and women of various ages move along the sequence and complete their study of each course with the help of tutors, others must stand ready to accompany them in acts of service undertaken according to their strengths and interests...*

In **England** there are presently more than 300 tutors, over 160 teachers of children's classes, and 95 animators of junior youth groups. Some 500+ educational activities serve more than 2,000 participants. Developing the capacity of those who are facilitating activities thus becomes critical. During the pandemic, three collaborative groups clearly emerged—one for each of the educational imperatives—who consult regularly, follow the progress of each activity and share insights from the grassroots, which are then disseminated through the coordinator and collaborators serving their region.

Also in **England**, there are presently six friends following the progress of children's classes, seven for the junior youth empowerment programme, and seven for the main sequence of courses. Similar structures for reflection and the sharing of learning and experience are emerging for tutors, animators and children's class teachers in all regions of the UK, as well as in advanced clusters such as in **Greater London, Greater Manchester, Northern Lights** and **South Wales**. The creation of such spaces accelerated in the past year.

*- The capacity to invite individuals into the courses of the institute.*

The 29 December 2015 message of the Universal House of Justice to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors spotlighted the concept of an expanding nucleus of friends with the institute at its heart. In referring to a nucleus it highlighted that, “*similar to the development of a living organism, growth can occur quickly when the right conditions are in place*” and that, “[f]oremost among these conditions is an institute process gaining in strength, given its centrality to fostering the movement of populations.”

The community's appreciation of this central point was enhanced during this year. Focused attention was given to advancing learning about this foremost condition by friends serving in nuclei in every setting. This theme was also at the heart of the programmes of all of the teaching conferences, as well as the planning and budgeting meetings at the cluster and regional level. If the aim of the Bahá'í Faith is to create communities that reflect the vision of Bahá'u'lláh—and if the training institute is the instrument that will raise within people the spiritual insights, skills and qualities necessary to contribute to this—this year we understood more profoundly than ever before that we needed to learn how to invite people into the courses of the institute. Hence, the need to articulate answers to questions such as: How do we describe the mission of the Bahá'í community? What is the training institute? How do the courses of the training institute enable participants to make a contribution to the betterment of the world?



In **Greater London**, the institute coordinator met weekly with a group of eight collaborators, with the aim to raise their capacity to work with the tutors around them. The collaborators studied guidance together about the quality of tutoring, accompaniment and how to increase the flow of individuals into, and through, the sequence of courses. Collaborators then met with tutors, reflected with them and supported them to accompany participants in courses into the field of service.

Two youth tutoring some younger youth were accompanied by collaborators, and during the study of Ruhi Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* online, raised capacity in the participants to share prayers with their families. They are working together towards creating a devotional and plan to study Book 2: *Arising to Serve together*.

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And how do we invite people to walk a path of service with us? This capacity to invite others to join us in building communities was greatly strengthened this year with the publication of revised editions of Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* and Book 2: *Arising to Serve*. The purpose of the institute is beautifully set out in the introduction to Book 1, “A Few Thoughts for the Tutor” and the revisions to the book itself have been of enormous assistance in building capacity to invite and have meaningful conversations. Drawing on the talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Book 2 explores themes of spiritual and social significance. This course aims for the participants to develop a measure of ease in explaining the teachings, aligned with the thoughts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It equips one, spiritually and intellectually, to articulate clearly and to converse with parents of children and junior youth, with youth and with adults. Thus, across the country, in numerous spaces, tutors delved into these new versions of Book 1 and 2 and many new Book 1s started.

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During lockdown, the believers found more time to engage with the training institute process. The normal orders of Ruhi books from Bahá'í Books UK of 5-10 per week jumped to 50-60 each day. When the warehouse had to close, an emergency plan was put into action—with help from the Training Institute Board for England—to move the stock of books to the Bahá'í Training Centre, from where delivery to the friends was able to continue.

The 2020 Easter period saw more than 80 people in England gather in 17 study circles on Zoom. A residential period had been planned at the Bahá'í Training Centre prior to the pandemic, but the lockdown meant that the activity had to move swiftly online. This required consultation around how to share the arts, how to create a sense of unity in the face of physical separation, and how to ensure that participants were able to truly engage with the materials. Such were the bonds of friendship formed over the call, that many study circles then went on to study the next book in the sequence.

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#### *- Continental Board of Counsellors: Ruhi Book 1 waves*

The National Assembly was pleased to learn that the Continental Board of Counsellors for Europe had initiated waves of intensive study and reflection by tutors across Europe of Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, leading to participants starting a study circle with friends and neighbours. The first wave, at a European level, took place during January and February 2021. A second wave followed for the United Kingdom in April 2021, and tens of tutors participated. Further waves will follow. This is a most promising initiative.

#### **2.4 The movement of clusters from one stage of development to the next**

For a cluster to advance from one stage of development to the next, the number of individuals serving as protagonists of the Plan within the cluster needs to increase:

*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.*

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

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### Higher books in the Ruhi Institute sequence of courses

This year, during lockdown, the community took the opportunity to engage in studying the books in the higher sequence of courses in great numbers, particularly the three units of Ruhi Book 8: *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*, and the three units of Book 9: *Gaining a Historical Perspective*. Some 400 units of Book 8 and 450 units of Book 9 were completed in the 10 months to March 2021. The National Spiritual Assembly was pleased to learn of this response since, as these Books are studied, they profoundly enrich the life of the community, strengthen the believers' understanding of the Covenant, fortify their relationship with the Universal House of Justice, and enhance their capacity to articulate the purpose of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed, such is their significance that, in response to a request of the National Assembly, the Regional Bahá'í Councils have set a goal for the number of people completing Books 8 and 9 during this special year during which the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will be commemorated.

Additional units of higher books were also published this year and these will gradually be rolled out to the community. Ruhi Book 13: *Engaging in Social Action* and Ruhi Book 14: *Participation in Discourses* are, among other things, raising our capacity to engage with the world and to articulate the Bahá'í contribution to a global society and its construction. Already nearly 300 friends have completed units of Book 11: *Material Means*, which has raised their consciousness of the joy of having a generous heart and enhanced their relationship with the various funds of the Faith.

The following are the books in the higher sequence of courses from Book 8 onwards

- Book 8 – *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*:
  - Unit 1 – *The Centre of the Covenant and His Will and Testament*
  - Unit 2 – *The Guardian of the Faith*
  - Unit 3 – *The Universal House of Justice*
- Book 9 – *Gaining an Historical Perspective*
  - Unit 1 – *The Eternal Covenant*
  - Unit 2 – *Passage to Maturity*
  - Unit 3 – *A Sacred Enterprise*
- Book 10 – *Building Vibrant Communities*
  - Unit 1 – *Accompanying One Another on the Path of Service*
  - Unit 2 – *Consultation*
  - Unit 3 – *Dynamics of Service on an Area Teaching Committee*
- Book 11 – *Material Means*
  - Unit 1 – *Giving: The Spiritual Basis of Prosperity*
  - Unit 2 – *The Institution of the Fund*
- Book 12 – *Family and the Community*
  - Unit 1 – *The Institution of Marriage*
- Book 13 – *Engaging in Social Action*
  - Unit 1 – *Stirrings at the Grassroots*
  - Unit 2 – *Elements of a Conceptual Framework*
- Book 14 – *Participating in Public Discourse*
  - Unit 1 – *The Nature of Our Contributions*

During the year, **England** saw an increase by about 20% of all educational activities. In **Greater Manchester** alone, attendance in study circles rose from 94 to 163 friends, with 75 friends of the Faith participating.

The lockdown in **Scotland** witnessed an unprecedented 84% increase in the number of study circles and a 134% increase in participants. More than 30% of Scotland’s tutors took to facilitating study circles. In early March 2020, the Training Institute Board for Scotland hoped to have one regional tutor reflection gathering every three months; this rose to six such gatherings, with some 20 tutors meeting fortnightly for an online reflection.

In **Wales**, the Training Institute invited all Ruhi Book 7: *Walking Together on a Path of Service* tutors to actively learn together about tutoring, of which 40 replied positively. There have been a number of online encounter spaces held by the regional institutions for these tutors to learn together, centred around regional institute camps. An outcome of this is that in **North Wales**, a group of tutors has been studying regularly, re-engaging with Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, and working actively to put the institute at the centre of their plans and actions. **Central England** also began a course of intensive training sessions, which saw many individuals arise to serve as tutors. Youth were a particular focus for the sub-region and many were invited to begin study circles.

In **Northern Ireland**, the pandemic propelled a sharp rise in the forming of Ruhi Book 1: *Reflection on the Life of the Spirit* study circles. Drawing on the energy of friends in response to the revised version of the materials, a regional tutor reflection space was opened up. Friends from across the region gathered periodically to reflect upon the conversation around inviting others to the first course in the sequence. Between May and August 2020, some 13 new Book 1 study circles began in the region. This demonstrated a significant rise in the capacity of the Northern Ireland community to initiate and invite friends of the faith to Book 1 and increase the flow into the Institute. There was also a sharp increase in the number of participants in Ruhi Book 8: *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh* and Ruhi Book 9: *Gaining a Historical Perspective*, propelled by friends who took the opportunity to connect friends from all over the region using Zoom.

*- The devotional character of the community*

Lockdown presented new challenges in lending support to, and accompanying, others who were striving to advance their clusters and reach out to new souls. Devotionals were, however, one portal to which people could be readily invited.

<b>Devotionals in progress</b>			
	<b>No. of regular devotional meetings</b>	<b>Total average no. of participants</b>	<b>Estimated no. of friends of the Faith</b>
<b>Oct 2019</b>	658	3267	1225
<b>Apr 2020</b>	889	4357	1673
<b>Mar 2021</b>	1069	4866	1698
<b>% change 11 months</b>	<b>20.2%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	<b>1.5%</b>

From the moment the United Kingdom first went into lockdown, the Bahá'í community instinctively turned to prayer. The Naw-Rúz message of the Universal House of Justice observed that the “*world stands more and more in need of the hope and the strength of spirit that faith imparts.*” The number of online devotional meetings increased—some individuals and communities even hosting them on a daily basis—creating a sense of solidarity and support, where ardent prayer for the relief of suffering conveyed “*qualities of tranquillity, confidence, and reliance on God,*” and led to “*elevated conversations.*” Isolated believers found themselves able to join with friends they had not seen face-to-face for years. Those who in the past felt unable to host in-person devotionals were able to create a space to which they could invite neighbours and friends. **Devon**, for example, was one of many clusters where people connected across generations with one 90 year-old friend able to join devotionals from a retirement home, with the kind assistance of its owner.



The National Spiritual Assembly invited the whole community to join together in a *Day to Pray* on Saturday 4 April 2020. Hundreds of friends responded, finding creative means to invite their friends.

To lend impetus to the efforts already underway, the National Spiritual Assembly invited everyone to join together in a *Day to Pray* on Saturday 4 April. On that day, for example, 27 devotionals were held in **Scotland**, attracting more than 400 participants, at least one third of them friends of the Faith. A weekly parent and toddler/baby devotional and deepening that started at the local level extended to the whole region. The hosts of devotional meetings in Scotland began to meet monthly to reflect together. Meanwhile, in the Leith neighbourhood of **Edinburgh**, the nucleus of friends created a Zoom space for individuals to engage in meaningful conversations. One of the team said, “Scepticism over whether activities would work smoothly online was quickly replaced by excitement. Of course there was the odd challenge of a child leaving the screen at the climax of a story to grab their doll or the appalling sound from the microphones when attempting a group singalong at a devotional! We quickly learnt from these challenges, and after adapting to the intricacies of our new reality, we found that the activities worked really well online and became a source of profound comfort and joy for all involved.”

In response to the Universal House of Justice’s Naw-Rúz message, the creation of the *Elevate* website was a further National Spiritual Assembly initiative to foster the devotional character of



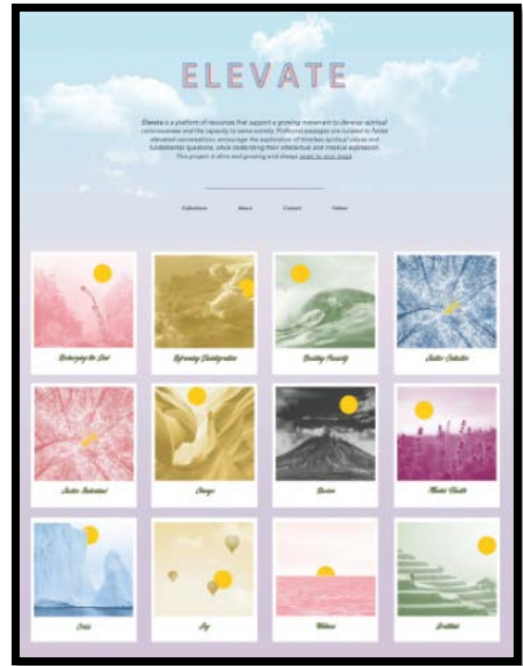
the community and to provide resources—including prayers, quotations, music and video clips—to individuals and communities to create a devotional space online. Many friends have availed themselves of this rich repository of materials, and reports suggest that the collections on various themes have been useful to the friends throughout the year.

*- Junior youth groups and children’s classes*

The Junior Youth Spiritual Empowerment Programme had to adapt to the new circumstances, with many groups continuing sessions, service projects and junior youth camps using online platforms. Although it has been more difficult to expand the programme, this has still been possible; new groups have formed, and junior youth have invited their friends to join the programme. One fruit of the current period has been that a growing number of people, especially parents and older siblings of children and junior youth, have begun to take ownership of the community-building process.

Some children’s class teachers showed great creativity and ingenuity to get materials out to their participants. In **Broomhall, Sheffield**, a neighbourhood team created packs with adapted lessons from Grade 1 children’s classes, arts supplies and games, which were shared with families. The children were then encouraged to go through the lessons with their parents and siblings. In an online space organised by the team, families shared their art, played games, and even sang together. In **Hackney, Greater London**, young people involved in the neighbourhood projects took the opportunity to teach their younger siblings the alphabet as part of their service to the wider community.

A few days before the lockdown came into effect a junior youth group in **Ardwick, Greater Manchester** decided to make food for a local homeless shelter. A mother of a junior youth (pictured, middle right) who had only recently joined the group became very keen to help and made large trays of food as a contribution. In both **Ardwick** and **Moss Side**, packs (pictured, bottom right), were distributed to families containing children’s class,



junior youth and institute materials for families to use once it was no longer possible to meet in person.

In **Bristol**, a nucleus of friends organised two online family camps, open to all. Wanting to share the invitation more widely, the team created a promotional video that was shared on social media and with friends in the South West. The camp attracted more than 142 children, junior youth, and adults. It allowed friends to invite their neighbours and families to experience community-building activities. Local facilitators were used to raise both capacity and enthusiasm in the cluster. Being online concentrated the organisers’ energies on the content of the sessions and the invitations, rather than the usual logistics of managing a venue and food.

The challenge of maintaining children’s classes in an online space is indicated by the statistics below. Remarkably however, the number of participants in both children’s classes and junior youth groups was maintained and even increased compared to pre-pandemic levels.

	Children's classes in progress			JY groups in progress		
	No. of children's classes	Total no. of Participants	Estimated no. of friends of the Faith	No. of junior youth groups	Total No. of Participants	Estimated no. of friends of the Faith
<b>Oct 2019</b>	145	645	385	72	393	313
<b>Apr 2020</b>	153	720	458	83	456	360
<b>Mar 2021</b>	137	693	434	82	416	316
<b>% change 11 months</b>	<b>-10.5%</b>	<b>-3.8%</b>	<b>-5.2%</b>	<b>-1.2%</b>	<b>-8.8%</b>	<b>-12.2%</b>

*- Teaching in lockdown: Teaching Conferences on Zoom*

Prior to the pandemic, the National Spiritual Assembly had called on all Regional Councils to hold Teaching Conferences as a means of fostering a culture of teaching among the friends and lend impetus to the work of the final year of the Plan. Despite the challenge of not being able to have such a gathering face-to-face, each region held highly successful online events.

Teaching conferences in **England, Northern Ireland, Scotland** and **Wales** connected hearts and inspired action. More than 700 friends from **England** attended three Regional Teaching Conference sessions held over the weekend of 27-28 June 2020. Moving video devotionals were held on the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the spiritual heritage of the English Bahá’í community. Break-out workshop groups enabled participants to explore the “twofold moral purpose” and an “expanding of nucleus of friends.”

**Scotland’s** *Clear Voices* conference took place over two sessions on 30 May and 20 June, each attracting more than 140 friends. The first focused on teaching and fostering meaningful

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In **Wales**, it has been a challenging year to strengthen and expand children’s classes and junior youth groups. However, towards the end of the year, after a continued process of learning, friends in **West Wales** and **South Wales** successfully started children’s classes, with two new ones forming in West Wales, a new class in **Cardiff** with 16 classmates of Bahá’í children, and a new class in the **Ely** neighbourhood. There are currently a total of eight children’s classes across the region with around 30 children, the majority friends of the faith, and one junior youth group in Ely, strengthening with participation from four families in the neighbourhood.

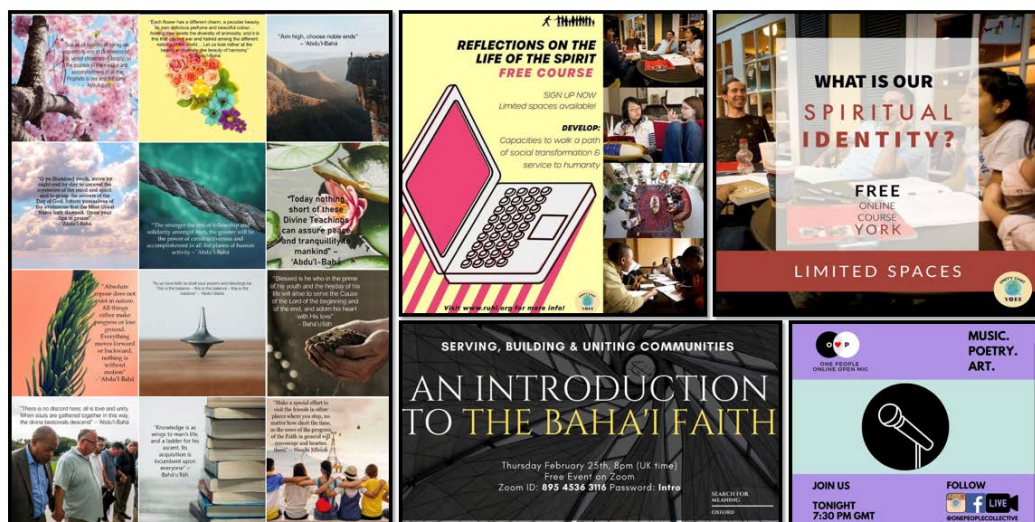
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conversations, while the second explored the centrality of the institute to growth. A major feature was the use of the arts, including drama, visual presentations and storytelling. These were created by various households including children, junior youth and youth from Scotland and the Faroe Islands, conveying a sense of both historical perspective and where humanity is heading.

An uplifting and joyful teaching conference session for the friends in **Wales** was also held over three evenings—29 June, 30 June and 1 July—with a total of 70 friends attending. Similar to all of the Teaching Conferences in each region, the focus was on the spiritual heritage of the region, the concept of an expanding nucleus of friends, and turning to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and His qualities as a teacher of the Cause. One participant noted, “The devotion to the Cause was truly felt over those three days and I am sure the spirit has been illuminating our meetings since.”

In **Northern Ireland**, more than 80 people gathered for their online teaching conference, drawing inspiration from the history of the Faith and reflecting on how individuals could contribute to the progress of the Plan. A participant remarked, “People have developed greater confidence in reaching out to their friends and starting Book 1s and devotionals. This is happening in both neighbourhood settings but also in the wider cluster where it had previously been more challenging.”

*- Teaching in lockdown: Online outreach*



A selection of some of the many online and social media outreach initiatives taken throughout the year

How to reach out to new souls within the restrictions brought about by the pandemic became a constant question throughout the year. With devotional meetings increasingly being understood to be a portal to other activities, including friends joining in the study of Ruhi Book 1, teaching teams and nuclei of friends began to find ways of inviting new participants. A number of online initiatives were launched throughout the year to learn more about social media as a tool to attract new seekers to core activities. For example, a group in the **North of England** was keen to try to learn about how to use online spaces to teach the Faith, engage in meaningful conversations, enhance the devotional character of the community, and stimulate other communities to do the same. This initiative, titled *Northern Souls*, made use of Facebook, Instagram and Soundcloud to share materials and invite interested people. With a conscious effort to focus on images of the North to highlight the local nature of the endeavour, the *Northern Souls* team posted quotations, pictures, videos and podcasts. Online devotional spaces, called *Kindle the Spirit*, and Zoom



firesides, titled *Elevated Conversations*, are also offered to further engage with pressing discussions of the day. Another initiative, *York Unity Chat*, focused on building and strengthening local community bonds. Activities had begun to flourish in **York's** The Groves neighbourhood and, undeterred by the lockdown, the friends set about continuing and growing their activities. In a themed space, friends came together weekly for prayer and to discuss ways to advance community based on quotations from the Writings. The friends explored the practice of paying for placed postings on social media to help promote the gatherings to a wider audience, and in time invite participants to engage in some of these existing community-building activities. In time the numbers of individuals who joined their online space increased and from this, other activities started.

In **Oxford**, an initiative titled *Search for Meaning*, *Oxford* used Eventbrite, in addition to Facebook, to invite people into a weekly, one hour discussion based around a particular theme, while in **Cumbria**, Facebook and the Nextdoor app have provided a natural route to follow up with people who have expressed interest in the Faith. The National Assembly has supported this creative movement by hosting Zoom spaces on the national level for friends to share their experiences and learn from each other.

*- Teaching in lockdown: Lending support to, and accompanying, others, mobile travel teachers, tutors and pioneers*

Lockdown was, by definition, an obstacle to the movement of Bahá'ís

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One good example of a creative approach taken involving pioneers and travel teachers was in **Solent**, a goal cluster.

### **Learning and support from the reservoir cluster, travel teachers and pioneers**

Five travel teachers, who had responded to the call of the National Spiritual Assembly, offered to help and wrote to the Regional Bahá'í Council for England offering to assist Solent. Around the same time there was a possibility of a pioneer family with experience in the methods of the Plan to move to the cluster. There was a conversation with them to encourage them to move to a large city with several neighbourhoods with propitious conditions for growth. The material needs of the family were also considered in a loving consultation and this all resulted in the couple moving to a neighbourhood near Basingstoke. As the couple has children, junior youth and youth there was great potential for several activities to begin, thus creating the possibility of a focus neighbourhood, which is, as we know, a prerequisite for growth.

### **Accompaniment by the institutions**

The team working with the group of travel teachers consisted of the two Auxiliary Board members and one of the Regional Growth Facilitators appointed by the Council for England. In June 2020 the travel teachers were invited by this sub-regional team to a meeting on Zoom to study some guidance—in particular the 3 May 2018 letter of the International Teaching Centre—and explore possible next steps. In consultation with the sub-regional team and the travel teachers, a plan emerged.

### **Fostering a Systematic Approach**

A travel teacher coordinator started to study Book 10.1: *Building Vibrant Communities – Accompanying One Another on the Path of Service* and consulted weekly with the travel teachers. Nuclei in different parts of the cluster were identified and the travel teachers were assigned to different nuclei and started to meet remotely with them regularly and frequently, to lend support and to accompany them. The second milestone was reached in a relatively short period of time. The core activities have increased from 10 to 28, with 18 devotional meetings, nine study circles and one junior youth group. There are plans for five more core activities rooted in an evolving culture of outreach and teaching. There are presently 21 protagonists in total and 51 participants in the core activities.

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from one place to another to lend support. What was clear, however, was that such support was essential, particularly for clusters that were working to pass the second milestone. The International Teaching Centre wrote in a letter dated 3 May 2018:

*It is important for any friend helping from outside to realize that capacity building requires intense effort and giving much time. Mobile tutors and visiting teachers might not succeed in achieving their objective if they dedicate only weekends; the seeds of their endeavour are more likely to germinate and grow deep roots if they visit the cluster for two weeks at a time, for example, or even decide to pioneer for three months or more. The demands of the Plan in the next six cycles require expanding the pool of such dedicated friends in every region and country at a scale never before experienced.*

In spite of the challenge of lockdown, a number of friends have arisen to pioneer or serve full-time during the past year to support goal clusters, including **South-West Scotland, Suffolk and Devon**, and to neighbourhoods in **Thames Valley, Northern Lights, Forth, Greater Manchester, Greater London and South Wales**. We have also seen friends arise to serve as pioneers in the Balkan countries during the year.

With reinforced membership, the National Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee has set for itself the objective of learning how to raise awareness of the spirit of pioneering and the pioneering needs in the UK. Collaboration with Regional Councils was strengthened through consultations with each Council as well as participation in their annual Planning and Budgeting meetings which enables the Committee to better understand the needs of the Plan. In the East of England as part of a youth gathering, an online workshop was held to explore a period of service which was attended by 21 participants. In the Northern sub-region of England an online event called *Arising to Serve* was held for parents, youth and junior youth to come together and be inspired by stories, interactive activities, explanations of the current needs and workshops tailored to each demographic. This was attended by 51 participants, including also Local Spiritual Assembly representatives, Auxiliary Board Members and their assistants.

#### *- The forefront of learning: Small settings in neighbourhoods and villages*

During the past year, ongoing work in neighbourhoods has continued to be a key area of learning, as systematic and intensive efforts in these settings has shed light on the dynamics of fostering an expanding nucleus of friends and its effects on a local community. The table overleaf indicates the strength of the more advanced neighbourhoods in the UK. At the beginning of lockdown, friends from these neighbourhoods came together to study Book 7: *Walking Together on a Path of Service* and this space proved to be invaluable for sharing experiences and effective approaches to the work in the middle of a pandemic. It has evolved into a national quarterly reflection for these more advanced neighbourhoods, which has recently been opened to nuclei that are not so advanced.

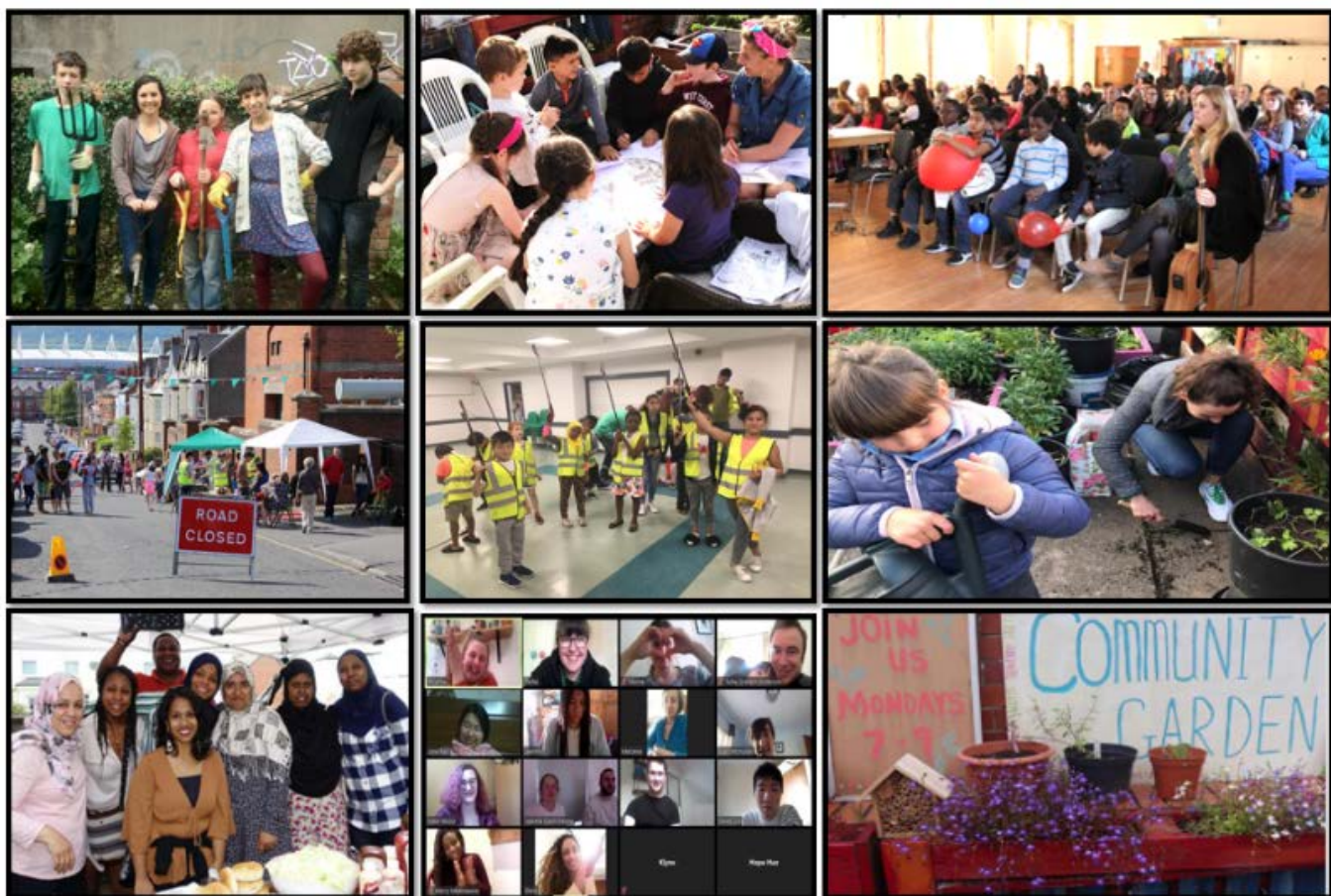
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In October 2020, a seven-day seminar was organised by the Continental Board of Counsellors in Europe to strengthen the work in neighbourhoods. Thirty-five clusters working intensively in a small geographic setting were invited, and friends from seven neighbourhoods across the UK attended. The seminar focused on disseminating experiences from three of the frontier neighbourhoods in the continent, and helped the nuclei who attended to make adjustments to their functioning, especially with regards to three capacities central to strengthening the training institute: conversations, training and accompaniment.

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Statistics for most advanced neighbourhoods - September 2020						
Region	Neighbourhood	Cluster	Resources	Core activities	Participants	Friends of the Faith
			Total			
England	Kilburn	Greater London	9	11	44	19
England	Woodberry	Greater London	13	31	160	151
England	Moss Side	Greater Manchester	18	22	95	78
England	Ardwick	Gt Manchester	12	20	82	70
England	Cumnor	Thames Valley	15	17	52	3
England	The Groves	N+E Yorkshire	9	23	73	46
N.Ireland	Windsor	Northern Lights	20	23	103	88
Scotland	Leith	Forth	9	13	51	45
Wales	Ely	South Wales	3	3	14	12
			<b>108</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>674</b>	<b>512</b>

The resilience of the Bahá'í community during the past year is exemplified by the following account from the neighbourhood of Windsor in Belfast (pictured below).



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## **Windsor neighbourhood, Belfast: Children's classes**

The friends in the neighbourhood have been striving to learn how to raise up new resources to teach children. During an expansion phase in November 2020, four youth and two junior youth who have been involved in the community-building work were approached and subsequently trained to become children's class teachers. Conversations began about the spiritual education of children, and these young friends were assisted to identify some families and children who may want to participate. This showed that junior youth and youth can be mobilised quickly to increase the pool of teachers, with the loving accompaniment of more experienced friends.

## **Junior youth spiritual empowerment programme**

At the beginning of the pandemic a team of friends working with junior youth began to meet to plan how to take the programme forward during the lockdown. Three new groups have been able to form during the year. At the outset, efforts were made to contact all junior youth who had some association with the programme. Efforts were also made to connect with their parents. Following this, a group was able to be quickly formed and was sustained online throughout the lockdown, twice a week. During the summer when restrictions eased, there was a one-week outreach period focusing specifically on meeting junior youth to start a new group. Daily efforts involved morning study followed by afternoons meeting junior youth and speaking to parents. Later, every evening, there would be short conversations in the group based on section 30 from Ruhi Book 5 and games. Many efforts were made over the following weeks to consolidate the group in a local community centre. While this proved difficult in the beginning, after persevering it was possible to get a group together after six weeks.

## **Social action**

The neighbourhood team supported a food drive, to address shortages in the area, initiated by a mother of a youth involved in the institute process. More than 200 parcels were delivered over a 3-4 week period, with a cohort of about 35 friends, including children, junior youth and other friends of the Faith who currently participate in the community-building activities. The garden space created at "The Windsor Community Hub" became the site of meaningful outdoor conversations. The local residents who attended the conversations then created a mini-library/book exchange beside the raised flowerbeds. There has also been a neighbourhood seedlings box to encourage more households to grow herbs and edible plants. During the winter months, local residents were also able to avail themselves of warm garments as well as baby clothes at a clothing exchange established by the neighbourhood team.

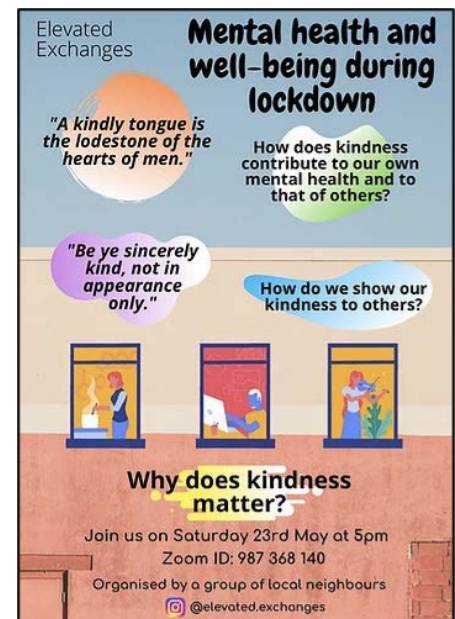
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An expanding nucleus of friends with the institute at its heart in any small neighbourhood or village setting, has the potential to evolve into an area of intense activity. Every cluster, as it moves towards the second milestone should strive towards having at least one such focused area and the number of these will multiply as a cluster moves towards the third milestone and beyond. The multiplication of areas of intense activity has thus become a focus of learning in every region and was the subject of consultation at the four regional Planning and Budgeting meetings early in 2021. Questions explored included: What are some of the characteristics of an area of intense activity? How do you identify a receptive area on which to focus? Having read the reality of an area, what approaches have proven effective in reaching out to the population? What support can the institutions give to a group of friends that wish to focus in this way?



One example of a neighbourhood in the early stages of becoming a focus of intense activity is in the **Ely** suburb of **Cardiff** in **South Wales**. Here, the Bahá'í Council for Wales has reported that the work began with a group of youth visiting and animating a junior youth group in a local community centre. This year resources were boosted by a number of pioneer moves; three friends are now resident in the neighbourhood, including a youth offering full time service. Friendships with families continue to strengthen, and activities are beginning to multiply with the formation of a new children's class with the younger siblings. Thus a team, supported by the institutions, have quickly engaged and built friendships with the local population.

Another feature of the pandemic was that it provided an opportunity for Bahá'ís and their friends to reflect more deeply on social action and to begin to share the methods, approaches and skills that have been honed through participation in the training institute process over the last two decades. Given the close friendships and relationship with families and neighbours that had been built up over a period of years, the opportunity was greatest in small neighbourhood settings. First stirrings of social action have begun to emerge naturally out of the many service projects of the Junior Youth Programme. Some examples have included participants helping younger siblings and friends with reading and homework, as well as organising activities to keep up spirits and foster friendships. Some neighbourhood teams have also created online friendship spaces in response to the loneliness, isolation and anxiety experienced by many during the crisis. Meanwhile, friends working with Persians newly arrived in the UK, created English language programmes, literacy support and the use of the arts to help alleviate mental health issues. A Persian Teaching Conference was also held in December 2020.



An online initiative to address mental health challenges during lockdown by the Kilburn community in Greater London.

All of these fledgling efforts have undoubtedly been enhanced by the participation of Local Spiritual Assemblies, neighbourhood nuclei and individuals, in the study of Book 13.1: *Engaging in Social Action* as well as a new compilation issued by the Universal House of Justice, *Social Action*. In the latter compilation, we are reminded of the following quotation from the 29 December 2015 message of the Supreme Body which gives perspective to the importance of these fledgling efforts:

*However humble an instance of social action might be at the beginning, it is an indication of a people cultivating within themselves a critical capacity, one that holds infinite potential and significance for the centuries ahead: learning how to apply the Revelation to the manifold dimensions of social existence.*

#### - Receptive populations

Small settings where friends are working with a level of intensity are often working with populations that are proving to be receptive. Within any population, youth can be found to be the



most receptive element so it is not surprising that, in all such areas, no matter what the demographic, the majority of those that are joining in community-building activities are youth. In terms of the broader community, the Persian-speaking population (Iranians, Afghans, Kurds) is seen to be particularly receptive, and the pandemic created many challenges and opportunities. One example of this is in **Greater London**. Since the lockdown began, a nucleus of friends has been working with Persian speakers, as never before. Many asylum seekers have been temporarily placed in hotels and hostels across Greater London. Before the lockdown, there was one Bahá'í asylum seeker in a hostel, who started conversations with others he met there and later, in other hostels. This led to these contacts having their own conversations with other asylum seekers forming a “chain” of conversations.

Since March 2020, there have been at least five new circles studying Ruhi Book 1: *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit*, starting with a minimum of five new participants in each. There have been two enrolments. Along this path there have been a number of challenges, each giving new opportunities to explore and learn further. New experiences have been gained along the way, turning stumbling blocks into stepping stones for progress. One of the challenges was the translation of the revised Book 1 into Farsi, as it was not initially available. With the help of a few friends, they managed to translate it and eventually to get hold of provisional copies. As the team got more and more involved in the lives of those they were engaged with, they realised that their friends had some basic needs for such items as shaving kits, soap, shampoo, warm clothes, shoes, etc. Since then the team has been very involved in supporting these friends both materially and spiritually, and have been blessed with many friends donating goods.



#### - *Releasing the potential of youth*

The number of times that youth and junior youth are mentioned throughout this report is evidence that the youth are at the forefront of learning. Undoubtedly the impact of the pandemic on young people of all ages has been profound, and there was a consciousness of this throughout the community, seeking ways to support particularly those trying to continue their schooling and studies through this difficult time. In November, the National Assembly wrote to a number of selected Local Assemblies that had youth in their communities to give this their urgent consideration. Challenges highlighted included loneliness, isolation, missing in-person connections with friends, anxiety about studies, “Zoom fatigue”, not knowing the people they see online when they attend meetings (as they have never met them) and, sometimes, a passivity or a lack of purpose in existing online interactions. It highlighted the desire of youth to engage with other youth to discuss and reflect upon current social issues or spiritual themes.

A number of initiatives emerged from this, such as in **Surrey** where a forum started for youth to meet regularly. In **Cambridgeshire**, working with youth has become systematic and regular, particularly with university students, with efforts to reach out to and involve new friends in devotionals and study circles.

One example of a supportive space that has recently emerged was reported by the Council for Wales. Efforts have occurred through the year to support and engage with the youth population, leading to the creation of a “youth chats” initiative, which is a weekly open space for youth to engage in meaningful and elevated conversations, exploring together their questions, concerns, and aspirations. This space has also been an opportunity to raise capacity in others, as an appreciation of the space leads naturally to a desire to contribute.

In many clusters, there is a particular focus on releasing the capacity of youth. In **Greater Manchester**, the opportunity of social discourse naturally moves into inviting youth to participate in service activities. Institute campaigns with participants from two to three neighbourhoods has enabled the movement to advance. A regular youth gathering brings together some older junior youth who are now involved in service, helping with children’s class. In **York**, youth camps have been very useful in building relationships between the junior youth leading to their engagement in service. Youth in the **North of England** have been offering to assist in first milestone clusters aiming to move to the second, by enabling youth in those clusters to build a youth movement. **North and East Yorkshire** reported having daily conversations with youth to encourage them and engage in service. Spaces for youth and junior youth have been very informal at times with games and breakout rooms, but it is always connected to entering into training. In **East Midlands**, institute campaigns have assisted the involvement of youth drawing them into online activities, such as hosting discussion evenings with other youth and more recently seeing the emergence of a junior youth group.



Friends in the Hulme neighbourhood in Greater Manchester shared the joy of the Twin Holy Birthdays of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh with their neighbours, presenting them with hand-made personalised cards and prayers, a booklet about Bahá’u’lláh, and sweets.

#### *- Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity*

The undergraduate seminars offered by the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity are concerned with raising capacity in Bahá’í university students to participate in the prevalent discourses of society. The seminars started in the UK in 2008 and have continued to gain in strength. They have become part of the rhythm of the life of the community and the hope is to continue to build on this strength.

While the seminars in the UK usually take place over 10 days every summer, it was naturally not possible in 2020 for the seminars to proceed as normal. However, over the course of this year, Bahá’í university students have periodically come together online to review concepts and principles relevant to the world’s present condition. These gatherings provided the opportunity for participants to study materials, consult together, and analyse the events taking place across the globe through the lens of the two reciprocal principles of unity and justice that lie at the heart of the activities of our community. Approximately 90 youth participated in these online gatherings at different points in the year, with the discussions helping participants to resist the disheartening

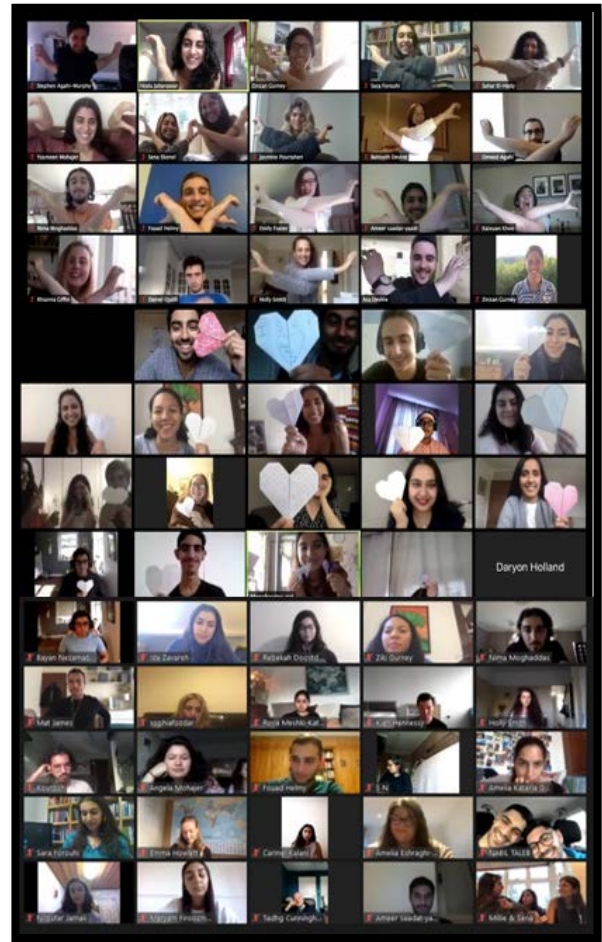
effects of the forces of disintegration of society and to see how they can align their efforts with the forces of integration that are propelling humanity towards a bright future.

Over the coming year, there will be further gatherings for Bahá'í university students to reflect on these relevant concepts and principles and to raise consciousness on how they can be applied to their reality. The annual seminar will take place in August and the hope is that the opportunity to attend the seminar is given to every single youth that is eligible. ISGP works with a pool of collaborators and facilitators who assist in the promotion and facilitation of the seminars. There will be gatherings throughout the year for those serving the seminars in this way to further familiarise them with the aims and purposes of ISGP, as well as the content, and to build capacity in a greater number of individuals to serve the needs of Bahá'í university students.

## 2.5 Uplifting spirits

In its message to all National Spiritual Assemblies, dated 9 May 2020, the Universal House of Justice stated that “creative approaches will be required to sustain the collective spirit of the community during difficult times.” The National Assembly gave particular attention to the role that the arts can play as a means of sustaining and uplifting the spirits of individuals and of the community. In a letter to all believers of 27 October 2020, the National Assembly expressed its hope that all would give serious thought to further imbuing Bahá'í community life and its interactions with those around it, with the arts. To support this deeper engagement with the arts, a section of the *Elevate* website, *Elevate Create*, was prepared as a resource and inspiration bank. As a result, many individuals, with their communities and friends, have been proactive in inventing creative and joyful spaces to create and share the arts together.

Spirits were also uplifted in **England** at two online summer schools, held in the north and south, which between them attracted 350 participants. The summer school in **Scotland** was imbued with a powerful devotional and local character. For two of the four days, some 120 friends connected





across the region in prayer, arts and study inspired by the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. For the two middle days of the school the activity was taken offline, into local settings where the participants were able to engage friends and neighbours outdoors where it was safe to do so or in local Zoom workshops. In January 2021, the *Scotland is Illumined* event brought together 200 friends to mark the anniversary of the Master’s visit to Edinburgh in 1913. There were artistic contributions from all age groups, including storytelling, music, poetry and dramatic presentations.

## 2.6 Disseminating Learning

### - *A multiplication of spaces*

The opportunities for sharing and disseminating learning multiplied during the year reminding one of the words of the House of Justice that, “*while certain possibilities have been temporarily closed, others have opened up, and new means have emerged for strengthening existing patterns of activity.*”

Numerous online spaces were opened up or were strengthened at every level—national, regional, sub-regional and cluster—where guidance was studied and insights and effective approaches were swiftly shared and disseminated. Many of these spaces have been mentioned throughout this report and the National Assembly is pleased to note that both formal and informal means of disseminating learning accelerated during the year. Encouraged by the Counsellors, it is the hope of the National Assembly that more can be learnt about sharing experience and learning across the four regions of the UK. Given its size and population England, particularly, can contribute much to the other regions, but that is not to say that England will not also learn from advances being made in Northern Ireland, Scotland, or Wales; but having the lion’s share of the population, its experience is naturally helpful.

### - *The Learning Desk*

At the national level, the Learning Desk took on a new focus built around the following guidance of the Universal House of Justice:

*As it grows in capacity, the Desk will ensure that you have available in your decision-making process cogent analysis of the experience emerging in the country with regard to the movement of clusters and the development of human resources....Initially, the Desk can provide for you clear descriptions of what is happening in various clusters. As the number of these accurate descriptions multiply, the Desk will gradually be able to provide you with a thoughtful analysis of various aspects of the community-building process which will enrich the consultation within your institution and your consultation with the Counsellors. In the fullness of time, the Desk may also be able to prepare proposals for*





*improving the action in the field and for the strengthening of cluster and regional agencies for your consideration with the Counsellors.*

The Universal House of Justice, 4 November 2018, To a National Spiritual Assembly

In the coming year, which will see additional resources joining the Learning Desk, the Desk will strengthen its capacity to articulate and analyse the achievements made in regions and clusters across the United Kingdom, in order to assist the National Assembly to access, guide and disseminate insights emerging from learning unfolding at the grassroots. This will lay a foundation so that, by the beginning of the Nine-Year Plan, when required, the preparation of proposals for improving action in the field will naturally emerge of the consideration of the Counsellors and the National Assembly.

*- Drawing on the assistance of communities of proven strength*

The Universal House of Justice wrote in its 25 November 2020 message that *“[a]t the national, regional, and cluster levels, we look to communities of proven strength to help those in which less experience has accrued. In this year-long effort, every community must draw on whatever untapped potential it may possess and seek to overcome any obstacles that are impeding its growth, thereby preparing it for the demands to come.”* Every group of adjoining clusters within a region and sub-region of the UK has at least one cluster that is, or is striving to be, a reservoir cluster. Recognising that each cluster advances at a different tempo, the more advanced clusters can serve as reservoirs of experience and resources, supporting neighbouring clusters to swiftly move towards their next milestone. What has become evident in recent years is that these clusters need to realise that they are a source of untapped potential, of experience and learning, which will enable neighbouring clusters to advance. There is a need for a continuing outflow of experienced mobile tutors, travelling teachers, and pioneers from these clusters, as well as opportunities for friends from less experienced clusters to join in activities and reflection spaces in reservoir or potential reservoir clusters such as **Northern Lights, Forth, South Wales, Thames Valley, Greater London, Greater Manchester, Surrey, Essex, West Midlands, Gloucestershire and Somerset** and others.

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For more than a year, the **Essex** cluster has been supporting friends in the **Suffolk** goal cluster where there are 30 Bahá'ís, mostly isolated. Friends from Essex were identified to support a friend in Suffolk to start children's classes and devotionals over Zoom. They also supported by co-tutoring institute courses online, thus raising the capacity of local tutors and others to walk a path of service.

In **Lincolnshire** youth that could start junior youth groups were challenged because there was no tutor for Book 5: *Releasing the Power of Junior Youth*, so a tutor from a neighbouring cluster has assisted with this. Similarly, a nearby cluster tutor of Book 7: *Walking a Path of Service*, raised capacity among new resources to tutor Book 1: *Reflection on the Life of the Spirit*. This has led to new devotionals beginning.

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This was one of the conversations that regional agencies were exploring during their planning meetings in early 2021.

## **2.7 The advancement of clusters and the goals of the Plan**

The advancement of our clusters is the fruit of all of the focused activity that is outlined in this Annual Report. Presently the position across the United Kingdom in all clusters is shown in the

map on page 10 and is described in terms of stages of development in the table overleaf. Despite the challenging environment, it is true to say that almost all of the clusters across the United Kingdom made significant advances in the past year. These are particularly marked when friends in a cluster recognise that they have passed their next milestone and a number of clusters have seen this occur:

- **Dorset** passed the first milestone;
- **Lincolnshire, South West Scotland, Solent and North & East Yorkshire** passed the second milestone;
- **Thames Valley** passed the third milestone.

Current Milestone	Stage of development (matching colour on map)	Clusters in the UK and Faroe Islands	England	N. Ireland	Scotland & Faroe Isles	Wales	United Kingdom
	Clusters striving to establish a programme of growth	Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Orkney, North Highlands, West Highlands, Borders, Faroes, South West Wales, Mid Wales	2	0	5	2	9
1	Clusters striving to intensify their programme of growth and pass the second milestone	Cornwall & Isles of Scilly, Cumbria, Devon, Dorset, Norfolk, Suffolk, Western Isles, Hainsworth, Stars of the West	6	2	1	0	9
2	Clusters that have established a programme of growth, are aiming to strengthen it, and move beyond the third milestone	West Yorkshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Merseyside, East Midlands. North West Midlands, The Marches, Two Shires, Cambridgeshire, Wiltshire, Solent, North & East Yorkshire, South Yorkshire, North East England, West Midlands, Gloucestershire Avon & Somerset, Essex Surrey, Sussex, Kent, Hertfordshire, Northern Lights, Seven Valleys, Forth, Clyde, North East Scotland, Shetland, South West Scotland, South Wales, North Wales	21	2	5	2	30
3	Clusters sustaining a high degree of participation in all aspects of endeavours and managing the complexity.	Greater London, Greater Manchester, Thames Valley	3	0	0	0	3
<b>Total number of clusters, including Faroe Islands</b>			<b>32</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>51</b>

There are clear indications that other clusters will also soon reach their next milestone and swiftly move beyond. The National Assembly is particularly looking to those clusters that are seeking to establish an intensive programme of growth and thus pass the second milestone, this being the UK Bahá'í community's contribution towards the worldwide goal set by the Universal House of Justice for the Five Year Plan of 5,000 clusters having an intensive programme of growth by Ridván 2021.

A further clear example of how clusters have advanced during the past year can be seen with our third milestone clusters. **Thames Valley** has joined **Greater Manchester** and **Greater London** as having 100 or more protagonists who are working with 100s of individuals, as shown by this table:

Cluster	Data as of	Total activities	Total attendees	Friends of Faith
Greater Manchester	March 20	131	671	305
Greater Manchester	March 21	190	822	541
<b>Movement</b>		<b>59</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>236</b>
Greater London	March 20	330	1391	625
Greater London	March 21	421	1989	823
<b>Movement</b>		<b>91</b>	<b>598</b>	<b>198</b>
Thames Valley	April 20	116	573	230
Thames Valley	March 21	155	589	211
<b>Movement</b>		<b>39</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>-19</b>

The strength of the training institute that is driving these developments is, in some way, indicated by the increase in the number of all core activities shown in this table:

United Kingdom - All Core Activities			
	No. of all	Total average no. of participants	Estimated no. of friends of the Faith
Oct 2019	1203	5322	2296
Apr 2020	1690	7321	2751
Mar 2021	2129	8926	3058
% change (11 months)	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>21.9%</b>	<b>11.2%</b>

After completing their study of *Breezes of Confirmation*, a junior youth group in **Greenwich** was inspired to carry out a lockdown service project for an assisted living and supported housing facility in the area.

They assembled personalised items in beautifully decorated gift boxes for the 11 individuals who were identified by the organisation's staff to be most in need. On hearing of the project, other friends wanted to contribute. This resulted in nearly 60 decorated gift boxes with essential items, for all of the residents.



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# Milestones

## **First milestone – Programme of growth**

*Within every cluster, the level of cohesion achieved among the core activities must be such that, in their totality, a nascent programme for the sustained expansion and consolidation of the Faith can be perceived. That is to say, in whatever combination and however small in number, devotional gatherings, children's classes and junior youth groups are being maintained by those progressing through the sequence of institute courses and committed to the vision of individual and collective transformation they foster. This initial flow of human resources into the field of systematic action marks the first of several milestones in a process of sustainable growth.*

Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

## **Second milestone – Intensive programme of growth**

*Reaching the second milestone along the continuum of development, which we described to you five years ago, is accompanied by advances qualitative, but also quantitative—such as a rise in the number of those involved in conversations that enable receptivity to be discovered and nurtured, in how many homes are being visited, in core activities and participation, in how many individuals are beginning the sequence of courses or supporting others as they gain the confidence to serve. Attendance at gatherings to mark the Nineteen Day Feast and Bahá'í Holy Days is being fostered by Local Spiritual Assemblies. Such advances are the more visible signs of a much finer development: the gradual spread, within a population, of a pattern of community life based on Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. And, naturally, the number of believers grows.*

Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

## **Third Milestone**

*For the movement of a population to have come this far demonstrates that the process which brought it about is strong enough to achieve and sustain a high degree of participation in all aspects of the capacity-building endeavour and manage the complexity entailed. This is another milestone for the friends to pass, the third in succession since the process of growth in a cluster was begun. It denotes the appearance of a system for extending, in centre after centre, a dynamic pattern of community life that can engage a people—men and women, youth and adults—in the work of their own spiritual and social transformation. This has already come about in around two hundred clusters, covering a range of socio-economic circumstances, and we anticipate that, by the conclusion of the coming Plan, it will be observable in several hundred more. It is a future to which the friends labouring in thousands of clusters elsewhere can aspire.*

Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

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## 2.8 Enhancing institutional capacity

### *- Local Spiritual Assemblies*

Regional Bahá'í Councils have been taking the lead in giving thought to raising the capacity of Local Spiritual Assemblies to systematically promote the Faith in their areas. The Bahá'í Council for England, for example, organised a series of Local Spiritual Assembly webinars with the aim of evolving a closer relationship with these institutions. It is understood that there is a range of capacities within the 100 or so Assemblies across the UK, and in England the Council is analysing these with a view to identifying the characteristics of an Assembly that is focused on teaching. From the guidance, for example, they have identified a number of capacities discernible in strong Local Assemblies. These include:

- Consultation embedded in action;
- Members having an understanding of the framework of the Plan based on personal experience;
- Turning to guidance regularly to inform plans;
- Making plans of action and carrying them out;
- Ability to read the reality of their community;
- Desire to see growth;
- Ability to delegate tasks and motivate others;
- Close collaboration with cluster agencies.

From this analysis greater clarity will emerge as to how the Council can assist and support Local Assemblies.

Meanwhile in other regions where there are fewer Local Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Councils together with Auxiliary Board members consult regularly whenever possible, study guidance and offer support to Local Assemblies in developing plans of action for their communities.

### *- Regional Bahá'í Councils and training institute boards: Annual planning and budgeting meetings*

The National Spiritual Assembly continues to follow and accompany closely the efforts of all regional agencies to advance the movement of clusters along the continuum of their development and to foster a steady flow of individuals through the sequence of courses. Last year was the first year in which the regional agencies (Councils and training institute boards) held planning and budgeting meetings, and almost at the moment these plans were made, the country went into lockdown. Nevertheless, whilst some strategies proved to be more difficult to implement, the regional institutions continued to focus on the main objectives of their Plans and found creative ways to advance each of their elements. This Annual Report is filled with examples of such creativity.

January to March 2021 saw another wave of regional planning and budgeting meetings. But this time the Regional Plans were well informed by well-conceived cluster plans, as the Councils had engaged the friends and cluster agencies in the planning process in the weeks leading up to the regional meeting. Thus, for the first time in the UK, we are witnessing a systematic process of annual plans being made by every cluster at the cluster level. Reading this reality, the regional

agencies then made their plans to foster, resource, support and advance the cluster plans. The implementation of these plans at the cluster and regional level, will undoubtedly test the capacity of all, but in doing so it will raise capacity to systematically follow and advance the process of entry by troops across the UK.

*- Nurturing the capacities of cluster agencies*

Book 10 of the Ruhi Institute has played an important role in raising capacity in groups of individuals across six clusters in **Central England** to reflect on the Bahá'í community's efforts to build vibrant communities and the skills, abilities, qualities and attitudes that characterise walking a path of service in the company of others. Since 2018, a series of sub-regional gatherings have been held to review the content of Book 10, reflect on experience, carry out field visits, and make plans of action. With the support of regional institutions, these gatherings have had a positive impact in raising vision, strengthening a long term commitment to learning in action, and enhancing the capacity to accompany others within each of the six clusters. The number of collaborators taking ownership to support the movement of their clusters has increased significantly as a result of these efforts: rising from 4 in 2018 to 38 in 2021. As these friends have consulted more systematically on the progress of their clusters, they have continued to draw on Book 10 to raise capacity in a wider pool of collaborators across each of their clusters, thereby learning about the systems and processes that enhance universal participation and build capacity for the continued growth of the Faith.

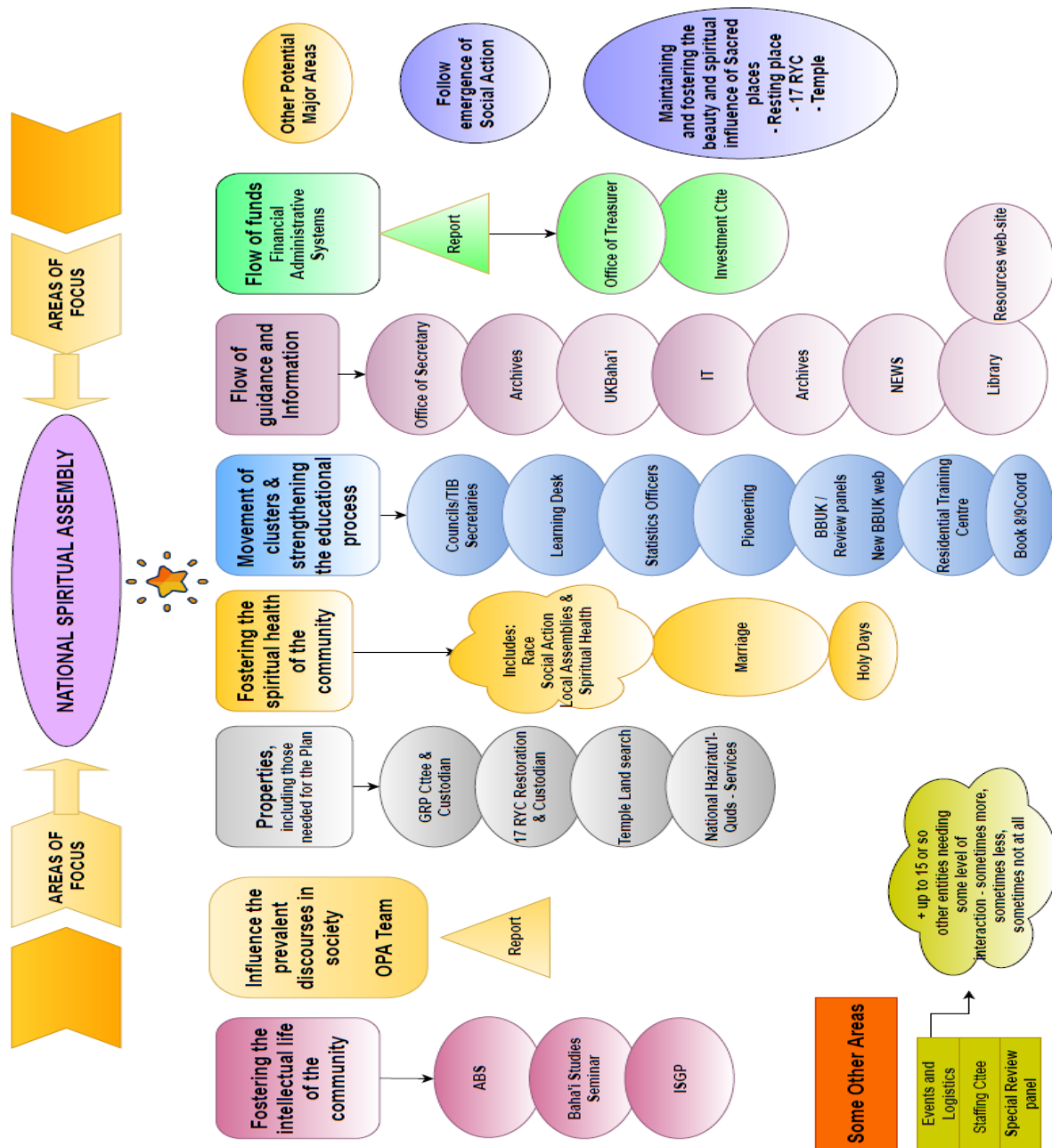
*- Systematising the work of the National Spiritual Assembly*

The National Spiritual Assembly continued to refine its approach to following the myriad elements of its increasingly multifaceted work. Last year it was reported that the National Assembly had identified a number of key strategic areas and that it was gradually setting out the details of the framework for each of these areas. Given the growing complexity of the work of the National Assembly, the aim is to provide a way in which the Assembly can oversee and periodically consult and guide the work at a national level within the context of the global Plan and provide a framework for its executive officers to oversee the implementation of its guidance and decisions. The approach is constantly being refined in light of experience, but the following chart is a representation of how it has structured its work. (See table overleaf)

The National Spiritual Assembly is served by a remarkable team of friends in the various offices associated with the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, including the Office of the Secretary, the Office of the Treasurer, the Services Department, the IT Department and the Office of Public Affairs. The manner in which each of these offices and, indeed, each of the friends serving within them adjusted immediately to the new reality, making every effort to ensure that the work of the Faith continued unhindered in the hiatus following the first and subsequent lockdowns, was exemplary. The National Assembly takes this opportunity to extend its deep appreciation to each and every member of the teams of friends serving the Institution.

At the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds, one outcome of the move to remote working during lockdown has been the realisation that technology enables work to be carried out differently, and potentially more effectively. The restrictions imposed by the pandemic proved that it is possible for much of the work of the National Office to be done remotely, and that, for some roles, staff members could be based outside of London. The National Assembly has committed itself to learning more about a hybrid model of working, mixing office-based work with remote and flexible working. This will enable the National Office to draw more readily upon the talents of the entire UK community,

not just those friends who live in London and the South East and who can commute to 27 Rutland Gate. It could also lead to engaging staff members whose family commitments mean that they cannot work normal office hours.



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## 2.9 The spiritual health of the Bahá'í community

Throughout the Five Year Plan just ending, fostering the spiritual health of the community has been a consistent area of focus and learning for the National Spiritual Assembly, working in close collaboration with the Institution of the Counsellors.

The aim has been to understand the principles that underlie—and to learn about approaches that will assure—the sound growth of the community and strengthen its wellbeing. Bahá'u'lláh has provided us with the understanding that humanity is a single body, in which every soul plays its part as an individual cell. As the Divine Physician, He has brought the healing remedy for its ills. Our task is to learn how to apply the remedy that is enshrined within the Writings of our Faith.

By giving this area focused attention, the National Assembly is gaining some insights into the challenges that the Bahá'í community and the individuals within it are facing, and is becoming better able to consider the principles and approaches that may be applied as suitable remedies in each circumstance. The National Assembly is in the early stages of learning about this. There are many elements to this work and more recently, together with Counsellor Varqá Khadem, the National Assembly has identified three specific areas that it wishes to follow and learn more about:

- **Developing the capacity of Local Spiritual Assemblies to foster the spiritual health of their communities.**  
Some Local Assembly have spent a weekend looking at a case study and, in the process, have developed a simple framework to guide their consultations and actions when dealing with spiritual health matters.
- **Strengthening the relationship of the believers with the Universal House of Justice.**  
Studying Ruhi Book 8: *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* and Ruhi Book 9: *Gaining a Historical Perspective* is central to this. (see below)
- **Marriage and family life.**  
Unit 1 of Ruhi Book 12: *Family Life and the Community – The Institution of Marriage*, has recently been issued. The units of this book will be invaluable in strengthening family life and fostering healthy marriages.

Recognising the importance of Ruhi Books 8 and 9—as a means for those studying it to strengthen their relationship to the Covenant and increase their understanding of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh—the National Assembly asked each region of the UK to set a goal for the completion of these two books. This initiative is offered as an expression of love for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of the Covenant, during the 12 months leading up to the centenary of His Passing. Ambitious goals have been set! England is aiming to increase the number of friends who have completed Ruhi books 8 and 9 to 1,000 and 500 respectively. Northern Ireland is striving to have 60 individuals complete both books. Scotland hopes to triple the number of those who have completed each of the books, and Wales is aiming to double their numbers. The effectiveness of these courses will, to a considerable extent, be determined by the quality of the tutoring. To this end, each region is supported by the National Coordinator for Books 8 and 9, Mr. Sam Roskams.



A children's class in Hounslow made loving greetings cards for the elderly residents at a local care home that they visited before lockdown began.



### 3. The funds of the Faith

*All Assemblies can assist the condition of the Fund and will augment the confidence of the believers, by the care and economy they exercise in the expenditure of the funds entrusted to their care, for the contributions of the friends are often made with great sacrifice and devotion and constitute a sacred trust and a challenge to the skill and wisdom of those called upon to administer them.*

The Universal House of Justice, To all National Spiritual Assemblies, 29 December 1970

During the last financial year, the United Kingdom struggled with the financial impact of the pandemic, with many people finding themselves out of work or furloughed, which resulted in a reduction in their income. Investment markets also took a significant tumble in March and April 2020 and the economy is only now slowly recovering. But, as noted within other sections of this Annual Report, the work of the Cause did not slow down. With the move online of most activities that would normally have taken place in person, the cost to the Fund was reduced.

The health pandemic did not hinder most of the planned projects from advancing, although in some cases, there were unavoidable delays. While activities could not take place at the Bahá'í Training Centre, work was carried out to improve its roof and gardens. The refurbishment of the Windsor Community Hub in Belfast moved forward, as did renovations at the Master's apartment at 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol. Conversations to advance the purchase of land for a future national Mashriqu'l-Adhkár continued apace. Alongside these significant projects, the upkeep of the Guardian's Resting Place was maintained. There were also the usual general costs to the National Fund to advance the teaching work, including the functioning of Bahá'í institutions and agencies.

Throughout 2020, the National Spiritual Assembly invited the friends to attend online deepening sessions, focussing on raising consciousness of two spiritual principles: sacrifice and universal participation. The deepening was offered across all regions and cluster and, although the numbers of participants were not as high as had been hoped for, the level of contributions during the year, amidst the backdrop of the pandemic, was very significant. The Investment Committee of the National Assembly also kept a close eye on what was happening in the market to try to navigate safely the investments held by the Fund.

During the year, the level of contributions directly made to the National Fund increased significantly—£1,083,643 in 2020, compared to £709,014 in 2019—which the National Assembly appreciates is likely to be as a direct result of the fund gatherings and the raising of the believers' consciousness about the financial needs of the Faith. Investments also generated a significant 8.86% return (up from just over 7% in 2019), some of which increased the reserves held, or were allocated to funds held for others. But as usual, a significant proportion was also included in the normal income for the year.

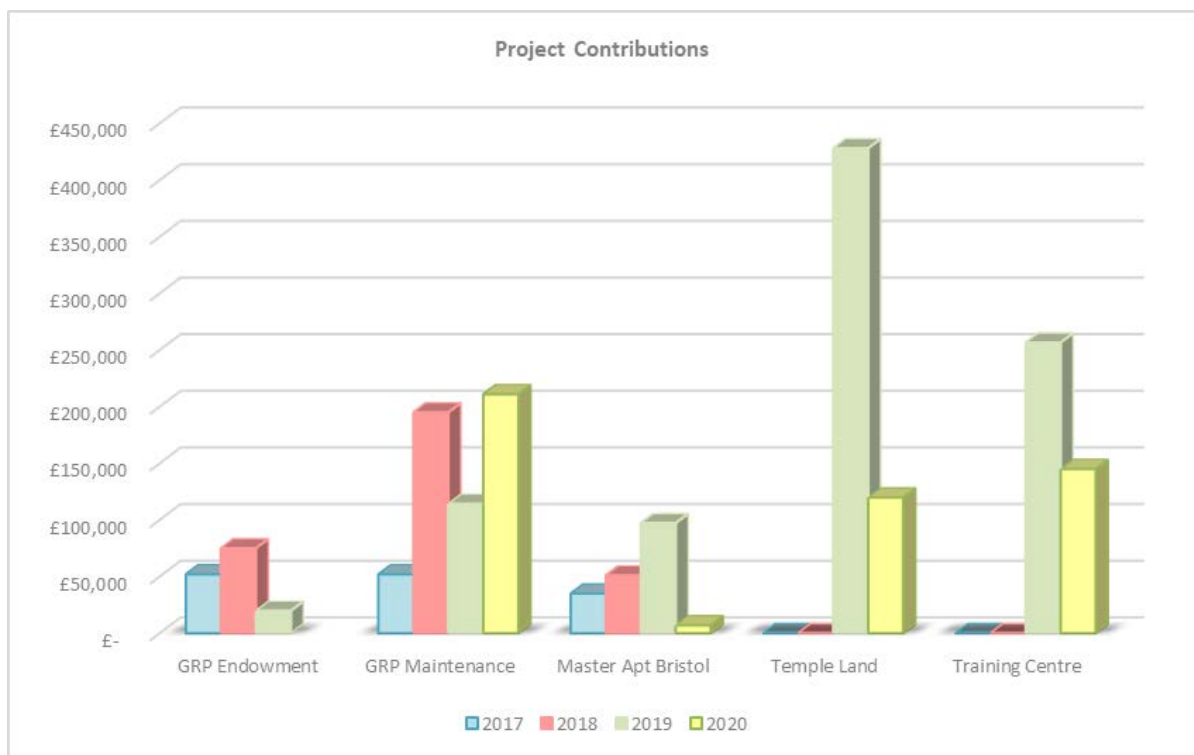
Thanks to these investment returns, the level of contributions from the community and the associated Gift Aid, the deficit in income to meet normal expenditure was just under £400,000, expenditure which included an additional £380,000 sent to the International and Continental

Funds in May 2020. To cover this deficit, the National Assembly drew down from unallocated reserves which have been built up in recent years.

### 3.1 Capital projects

In 2019, the National Assembly called for £5 million for capital projects. There was a wonderful response throughout that year from the community, although in 2020 contributions dipped slightly. Some additional changes have, however, taken place since.

The target of £1.3m for the Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund was reached, the figure required to achieve the investment returns needed to meet the day-to-day costs of maintenance at this sacred spot. The National Assembly therefore merged the Maintenance Fund and the Endowment Fund, and decided that it will not be allowed to fall below £1.3m.



Surplus investment returns allocated to the Guardian’s Resting Place will now be redirected to the refurbishment of the Master’s apartment in Bristol which, alongside contributions from the friends, should be sufficient to meet the renovation costs this year.

The total amount, therefore, still required from the community for capital projects is now slightly more than £1m, specifically to meet the goal of £2.5m set to purchase Temple land in or as close as possible to London.

### 3.2 Contributions to the National Fund

In the past, the UK Bahá’í community has built up reserves, due in part to the lower levels of expenditure. As costs have increased in the past three years, because of the demands of growth,

an income deficit has emerged. Contributions to the National Fund have not kept pace with expenditure, although 2020 saw contributions at an unprecedented level.

The historic reserves have been wisely invested and the investment returns, along with rental income generated from Bridge House in Tonbridge, have shored up recent income deficits. As mentioned above, reserves generated a considerable return in 2020. This was allocated to reserve funds, with the surplus going to annual income.

In response to the call for universal participation, the National Assembly is seeing a general upward trend in the number of contributors giving directly to the National Fund. To assist the friends to contribute in multiple ways, the online donations page will be updated this year to permit payments from sources other than credit cards.

During the coming year, gatherings to raise awareness about the Fund will continue to take place, with the National Treasurer and Regional Council Treasurers accompanying Local Assembly Treasurers to deliver deepening programmes. It is hoped these will further raise consciousness and generate an even higher level of contributions and more universal participation.

To give a sense of the level of contributions required for the coming year, the table below shows the budget for 2021 and assumes that if expenditure only increases marginally this year then reserves will need to be drawn upon again, even if the level of contributions remains the same in the coming year.

Income and Expenditure	Budget 2021	Actual 2020	Actual 2019	Actual 2018
Donations/Other Income (including Gift Aid)	£1,646,770	£1,735,053	£1,312,589	£1,272,871
Investment and Rental Income	£233,730	£356,829	£302,621	£131,651
Expenditure	-£2,729,269	-£2,654,818	-£1,993,844	-£1,895,333
<b>Income v expenditure</b>	<b>-£848,769</b>	<b>-£562,937</b>	<b>-£378,634</b>	<b>-£490,811</b>
Drawn from Deputisation fund	£27,118	£161,834	£10,269	£0
Drawn from other reserves to write off income and project deficit	£0	£401,103	£368,365	£490,811
<b>Closing Balance</b>	<b>-£821,651</b>	£0	£0	£0

### 3.3 Planning and Budgeting

In 2019, the National Assembly started working more closely with the Regional Councils to help them develop their own treasury offices. In Northern Ireland and England, these offices are being developed further to support the work of the Council with the appointment of treasury aides to work alongside the Council Treasurers.

In the first cycle of 2021, annual Planning and Budgeting Meetings were called to bring the friends serving at the grassroots, regional Institutions and Auxiliary Board Members to reflect together upon the plans for the coming year. A focus of these meetings has been the exploration of activity cycle by cycle which, in turn, affords the regional institutions the opportunity to develop realistic budgets in alignment with well-conceived plans. These will hopefully aid each

region to consider what resources are needed to meet the planned activity in the remaining cycles of the current Plan and to identify the level of financial support required from the National Fund.

A programme was also held for budget holders, dedicated to reflection upon how funds can be deployed judiciously once budgets have been established. This will be supplemented by quarterly reflections on budgets throughout the year.

*The sacrificial and generous contributions of the individual believer, the collective consciousness promoted by the community of the needs of the Fund, and the careful stewardship of financial resources exercised by the institutions of the Faith can be regarded as expressions of the love that binds these three actors more closely together.*

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015,  
To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors



The expansion and consolidation activities of the Cause throughout the United Kingdom are all entirely funded by the generous contributions—financial, and “in kind”—of the friends.

*Photographs taken before the current health crisis.*



## 4. The Regional Board of Trustees of Ғуқуқ'ллаһ for Ireland and the United Kingdom

Responding to the unusual circumstances of the past year with flexibility and creativity, the Regional Board of Trustees of Ғуқуқ'ллаһ and its Representatives quickly moved their educational activities online and learned how to facilitate study courses via social media. This resulted in increased participation from isolated believers, those less able to travel and in remote island communities, and Gibraltar. Study courses addressed such issues as: a basic understanding of the Law; making provisions for Ғуқуқ'ллаһ in a will; developing a new attitude to the acquisition and use of material resources; family life and Ғуқуқ'ллаһ.

There was an increase of approximately 50% on the previous year, in the number of activity reports. In addition, the Board has noted a growing number of meaningful conversations taking place about Ғуқуқ'ллаһ.

Learning how to collaborate effectively with other Bahá'í Institutions has continued to be a priority. The Board and its Representatives have worked, for example, with the training institutes in Ireland and the United Kingdom to help deliver Ruhi Book 11, *Material Means*. Collaboration with regional Bahá'í Councils resulted in online sessions and courses being delivered at this year's summer schools.

The 14th annual Regional Conference of the Board (pictured right) was held online in November 2020. The Board welcomed Counsellor Varqá Khadem as well as representatives of the International Board of Trustees of Ғуқуқ'ллаһ, both National Spiritual Assemblies, the Auxiliary Board, Regional Bahá'í Councils, and training institute members. The evening programme was a celebration of the life of 'Abdu'l Bahá which included music, stories and a presentation.



### - Vision and plans for the year ahead

A priority for the coming year is learning how to work in cycles of activities, with phases for consultation, planning, action and reflection. The Board is keen to gain experience of how this would work for our Institution and what can be learnt from this mode of operation. We would also like to learn about how increased accessibility to our activities online can be balanced with maintaining their local nature. The Board plans to enrich its commemoration of the centenary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the coming months by referring to the example of Thomas Breakwell, the first western believer to pay Ғуқуқ'ллаһ.

Challenges will be addressed by regular study, reflection and consultation. Accompaniment continues to be central to our mode of functioning: accompaniment of the Regional Board by the International Board; the Representatives by the Deputies; Representatives by each other; and the believers by the Representatives, as we all strive to gain a better understanding of this “mighty Law”. The International Board has invited the Regional Board to participate in one of nine online regional meetings, scheduled in 2021, for reflection and planning together as Boards and as Deputy Trustees.

## 5. The 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 its work in the areas of participation in the discourses of society, media, the Bahá'í presence on the Web, and defence of the Faith. In this tumultuous year, as in so many areas of life, social media and video conferencing apps had to be used to initiate, sustain and deepen OPA's relationships with journalists, parliamentarians, and discourse contacts.

### 5.1 Participation in the discourses of society

At the outset of the year, the Office intended to learn how to collaborate more closely with other organisations. This was made challenging as new modes of working, particularly with others, had to be developed because of the health crisis. Online spaces soon emerged, however, for the continuation of conversations from before the pandemic, as well as for new ones concerning the specific challenges that the crisis was creating.

The Office participated in more than 40 online spaces during the year. Interfaith activity accelerated as the Government increasingly turned to faith communities for support, enabling OPA to participate in many conversations on the power of religion to provide hope and support in difficult times, and to make a submission to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Faith Engagement inquiry.



Bahá'ís across the UK took part in online Interfaith Week activities, 8-15 November

#### - Reading UK reality

The challenges of the past year brought to light, or at least renewed focus on, a broad range of societal issues. These included racial inequality, economic injustice and regional disparities within the United Kingdom, as well as renewed attention to the role played by local communities.

To keep abreast of the rapidly changing national conversations, OPA staff and collaborators participated in regular sessions to develop a collective understanding of issues. These were cross referenced with the Office's own experience participating in various social spaces. Some of the emerging themes were not only expressed in OPA's reflection pieces and news items, but shaped the nature of some of its initiatives, for example a series of animated video clips and mini-podcasts.

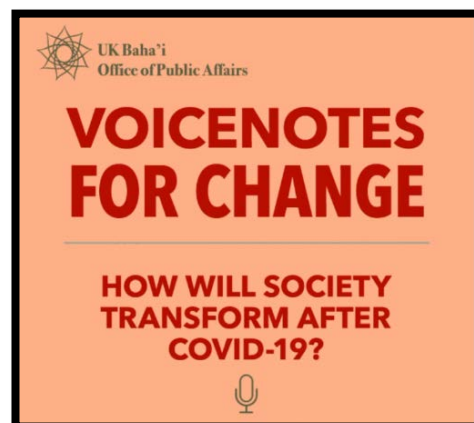


A screenshot from the animated video clip on *Values*

The Office studied a number of reports concerning the discourses on social cohesion and the role of religion in society [RORIS]. Engagement of local and national governments with faith communities increased as a result of the pandemic. Often the subject of religion is only addressed by government in times of crisis, and policies can be reactionary. The hope of many practitioners in the discourses of RORIS and social cohesion is that faith is considered more in future as a powerful motivator for countless millions to serve their communities.

## - Developing content

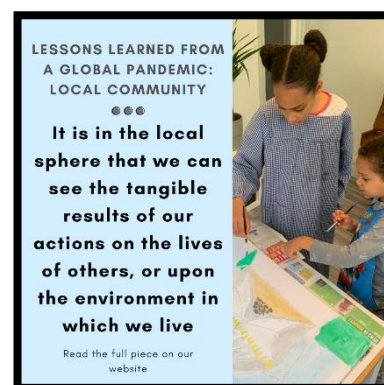
The Office renewed its focus on learning about developing content, as a tool to reach out to new contacts and engage more directly with existing ones. Short animations were created offering insights based on a Bahá'í perspective on the current situation. These were shared widely with the contacts of the Office, garnering positive feedback, and received more than 10,000 views on Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. Through a short mini-podcast series called *Voicenotes for Change*, friends of the Office briefly reflected upon society and how they hoped it might transform.



Additionally, OPA produced a number of written pieces with its collaborators and in partnership with likeminded originations. These included: an invited commentary on the Cohesive Societies Report; a piece on the LSE Faith and Global Society Blog, calling for reflection on the adversarial mode of public discourse; a number of reflection pieces and news items on the *UK Bahá'í* and OPA websites, reflecting upon the importance of the local community and the axis of public life, the operation of the media during the pandemic, and the nature of the relationships between nations during this global emergency.

## 5.2 Media

This year, many social injustices—racial, gender and economic—were highlighted by the pandemic. Consequently, there was significant conversation around how the media creates narratives around these particular issues and draws attention to them. Yet, throughout the health crisis, the media also focused upon the power of hope, community building and public service. These themes informed OPA's relationship building and conversations with media practitioners, of which there are now more than 30. During the year, these relationships were consolidated by asking such friends to contribute to media content. Many journalists have been more than willing to join OPA's podcast project while others offered to help in moving the project forwards. This has helped strengthen the Office's position within the media discourse, as well as deepen relationships and build collaborative ties with colleagues outside of the Bahá'í community.



A social media post from one of OPA's reflection pieces

The Office attended around 10 media spaces, including the Trust in Journalism Conference and webinars held by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. The most significant for OPA this year was the Religion Media Centre's weekly briefing space, where journalists and academics meet to discuss a particular story. This space allows the Office to connect with new and past contacts as well as gaining greater insight into what subjects are of interest to religion journalists.

In its submission to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Religion in the Media's inquiry into Religion and Broadcast Media, OPA posited that media practitioners should understand and

convey that religion is a system of knowledge that provides a framework for advancement towards a united society. Several articles were also written about the lessons learned during the pandemic.

The Office also continued its own, online devotional space. The second of these was dedicated to the memory of Bermudan-born actor Earl Cameron. This provided an opportunity to emphasise important themes such as service, racial justice, and the power of the arts. The annual reception of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Bahá'í Faith, held online, was attended by more than 50 people including members of parliament, journalists, civil servants, and religious representatives.



Some of the 50 friends attending the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Bahá'í Faith's annual reception. Alistair Carmichael MP is seen second from top left.

### 5.3 Bahá'í presence on the Web

The national Bahá'í Website has been receiving an average of around 40 visitors and 103 page views per day. Of these some 87% are new visitors, largely referred to the site via Google, or who access it directly.

Over the year, the national Website continued to be reviewed and refined, particularly with a view to bringing to life the local character of Bahá'í activities across the U.K. The Website is a tool that supports all the elements of the Office's work, presenting concepts that can be extended into conversations offline, responding to the concerns and needs of British society, and showcasing content that demonstrates the diversity of the Bahá'í community and its contribution to the betterment of society.

The pandemic—and the growing recognition of the importance of faith groups in building a more socially cohesive society—encouraged the Office to talk about the transformative power of religion. A video project is evolving as a dynamic and engaging way of using local stories and reflections from across the U.K. to explain and demonstrate the efforts of the Bahá'í community, where worship and service are central.

A news section was created within the national Website, pointing to practical examples within the discourse work. The Office also released a video story about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's generosity at a time of crisis, and an end of year review, which was used as an opportunity to update contacts on the Office's activities.





## 5.4 Defence

The Office has continued to defend the Bahá'ís in Iran and Yemen despite the pandemic imposing restrictions on meeting and briefing key officials and stakeholders. With long established governmental and parliamentary contacts, the transition to digital meetings was smooth. In some instances, OPA had immediate access to civil servants for urgent matters, as in the case of the Bahá'ís in Yemen. A number of meetings with members of parliament were secured, two of whom accepted the invitation to join the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Bahá'í Faith. Parliamentary questions were successfully tabled on Iran or Yemen.



Six Bahá'ís were released from prison on 30 July 2020 after being wrongfully detained for several years by the Houthi authorities in Sana'a, Yemen.

There has been a high turnover of civil servants during this period and new relationships had to be built, to create awareness about the significance and extent of the persecutions of the Bahá'ís. As restrictions relax, in-person meetings will be sought as they are more effective in building trust and having focused conversations, especially with journalists and new contacts.

On 29 January 2021, OPA met with the Prime Minister's new special envoy on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Fiona Bruce MP, to introduce the work of the Bahá'í Community and brief her on the recent development in persecutions of Bahá'ís. The Office also built relationships with new contacts, including NGOs working in gender and Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB), and gender and development. OPA has served as convenor for a group affiliated to the APPG on FoRB that wrote a commentary report on FoRB and the Global Landscape. Published in February 2021, the document is the product of a collaboration of Bahá'í, Christian, Muslim, Humanist and other voices and has been well received within the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. OPA also offered input on the chapters on Iran and Yemen.

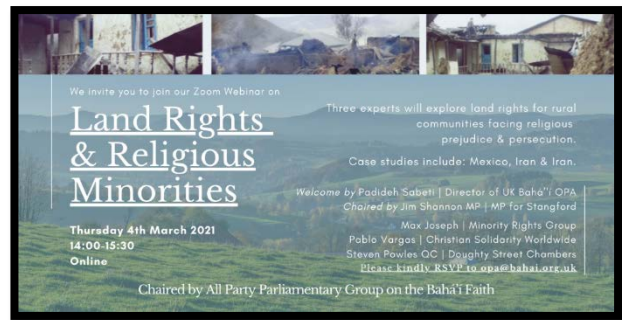
### - Attending and creating spaces

OPA contributed to a roundtable on the Middle East with Bna'i Brith, a Jewish interfaith charity. A presentation on the subject of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Yemen was offered alongside the presentations of a Palestinian Christian and a Jewish scholar to an online audience of around 60 people. The Office also participated in a high level Ney Rouz celebration with the Coptic Church, during which a Bahá'í representative spoke on the nature of interfaith collaboration and of shared work on freedom of religion and belief.



Some examples of press coverage during the past year

A webinar on the land seizure of the Bahá'ís in Ivel, Iran, was organised in collaboration with Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) and Minority Rights Groups (MRG). Two experts from these organisations joined Stephen Powles QC—a leading human rights barrister and Bahá'í—to offer a panel discussion on Land Rights and Religious Minorities, under the chairmanship of Jim Shannon MP. Further use was made of the materials from the seminar in social media outputs.



(Above) A webinar on Land Rights and Religious Minorities was held on 4 March 2021.

(Below) A tweet by Lord Ahmad in support of the Bahá'ís of Ivel.

UK officials, including Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon and the former special envoy on FoRB Rehman Chishti, continued to make statements on the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran and Yemen, using Twitter to voice the U.K. government's concern. OPA has also engaged with Ambassador Rita French, the UK Human Rights Ambassador, located in Geneva. She has spoken in defence of the Bahá'ís in Yemen and now attends regular roundtable meetings with NGOs facilitated by the Human Rights Due Diligence forum.



The Office was part of the international Bahá'í efforts in 2020 that saw the release of the six Bahá'í prisoners from Sana'a, thus indicating the strength of human rights advocacy. Across the first half of the period of the pandemic, OPA maintained contact with civil servants on the situation in Yemen.

Teamwork with OPA collaborators allowed outreach to new journalists and achieved coverage in English media, including *The Economist*, *The Independent*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, and *Kayhan Life*. Relationships have been established with at least three new journalists interested in defence work. Further collaboration with Local Spiritual Assemblies has allowed the Office to have more in-depth conversations with MPs beyond the defence work. There were 14 interviews with Padideh Sabeti on BBC Persian, ManotoTV, Iran International, and *Keyhan London* covering the persecution of the Bahá'ís.



In the coming year, content will continue to be created, including a podcast series, that supports Bahá'í contribution to discourse. Work will evolve further in establishing deeper collaborations with both Bahá'ís and others. The website will continue to be reviewed, with videos being created that offer a vision of Bahá'í community-building activities to visitors. A clearer social media strategy is also going to be developed. A focus for the coming year will be the commemoration of the centenary of the Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in a way that is coherent with the major areas of work of the Office.

## 6. Sacred Sites

### 6.1 The Resting Place of Shoghi Effendi

On 29 July 2020, the National Spiritual Assembly announced with great joy that—as a result of continuous and sacrificial contributions by the friends—the Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment Fund had reached its target of £1.3 million. The National Assembly had decided in 2010 to create an endowment fund that would generate an annual income to look after the day-to-day running of this sacred spot. A target of £1.3



million was set to be reached by Riqvân 2021, and the goal was achieved, nine months ahead of schedule. While contributions to the maintenance, long term upkeep and future developments at the Resting Place are still welcome, the National Assembly will ensure that the endowment total is never reduced and is wisely invested to help contribute to such costs.

Visitor numbers to the Resting Place were inevitably reduced this year because of lockdown restrictions. During the early days of the pandemic, New Southgate Cemetery was closed except for funerals. The custodians however managed to secure access to the Bahá’í-owned sections of the cemetery for daily maintenance purposes. When the cemetery re-opened later in the year, safety measures were put in place to minimize risk, including social distancing regulations, limiting the number of friends gathered at the monument, and the provision of hand sanitizer.

During the last few years, a number of major projects have been carried out to refurbish the Resting Place and its enclosure, to enhance and beautify its environs, and improve the facilities for those who serve there. The maintenance of the monument’s column, globe and steps have been carried out, in accordance with the scheduled programme and the eagle re-gilded. A set of scaffolding has been acquired for the more regular steam cleaning of the marble capital and a new detector has been installed within the upper enclosure to enhance security and decrease the number of false alarms triggered by animals.

This year, phases one and two of the verge landscaping project were completed successfully. Geraniums were planted with help from volunteers, shrubs in the lower enclosure were replenished, and four ornamental yew trees replaced the old ilex bushes in the upper enclosure. A new contract with the Cemetery was negotiated, resulting in a lower maintenance charge.





Signs marking the trees that were planted for the bicentenaries of the Births of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh were installed, as were signs for the rock samples from Mount Carmel (above) that are situated around the Cemetery.

Significant progress has been made in harmonizing the map of the cemetery with the National Spiritual Assembly's database and available plots for burial have been identified in both the Bahá'í-owned sections of the cemetery.

A video detailing the recent work at the Cemetery and encouraging visits can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gRJD0oKpl28>



## 6.2 The apartment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol

'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed the wish that the Bristol property owned by the Tudor Pole family, then known as the Clifton Guest House – in which He stayed on two occasions in 1911 and 1913 – would become a centre of peace and rest for pilgrims from East and West.

In restoring and refurbishing the apartment, bringing it closer to its appearance at the time of the Master's visit, the National Spiritual Assembly stated its hope that some elements seen in the original photograph (right) could be replicated, while retaining the room's present light and airy feeling.



The Drawing Room of the Clifton Guest House as it appeared in the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The work for the strip-out of the apartment having been completed during the previous year, this year saw a “pause phase”, to give time for careful consideration of the various elements of the design and furniture.

Following the refurbishment of the windows and shutters in Phase 1, drawings for the central folding doors within the apartment were created. The pattern of panels and detailing on these follows closely the style and form of the shutters.





Architect's visualisation of the Prayer Room showing the planned restoration of certain original elements such as the central folding doors, the fireplace, the light fittings, the ceiling rose and the mirror.

The design for the carpets for both rooms has been agreed upon and these are now being created in India. The Committee has worked with designers to develop ideas for the seating in the main reception room and for the wallpaper.

Drawings have also been created for the fireplace, one of the elements chosen by the National Assembly to be replicated; the ceiling rose for the main room, the outline of which was uncovered during the strip-out; and an existing alcove where it is planned to situate an archives cabinet. Various options for heating in the apartment have been considered and period radiators have been chosen.

During the strip-out, evidence was found that indicates there had been a door leading from the house next door into the main reception room, at the time of the Master's visit. Plans to reference this in the design have been drawn up. Further progress has also been made with the Bristol Civic Society concerning the proposal to have a blue plaque installed on the exterior of the building to commemorate the Master's sojourn there.

Phase Two of the construction work was scheduled to start in January 2021, however the firm of contractors was affected by the pandemic. Alternatives to move the work forward are under consideration with a view to opening the apartment to visitors in time for the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in November 2021.



### 6.3 Land for a National Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

*The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as “one of the most vital institutions of the world”, weds two essential, inseparable aspects of Bahá'í life: worship and service. The union of these two is also reflected in the coherence that exists among the community-building features of the Plan.*

The Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2012

In a letter dated 23 January 2019 the National Assembly announced to the community the goal of acquiring suitable Temple land by the end of the Five Year Plan, at Ridván 2021, for the building of a future Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Throughout the year under review, the Temple Land Acquisition Project Team has progressed a number of lines of action to realise the National Spiritual Assembly's goal.

As indicated in the guidance of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, the land should ideally be approximately two hectares in size (approx. five acres or 20,000 square metres), as close to the centre of London as possible (but not further than 15 miles or so from the perimeter of Greater London), and with the potential to be built upon.

The focus during this lockdown year has been to continue developing resources and tools to assist the Team to articulate the vision and purpose of a House of Worship to planning officials. Operating in a mode of learning, the Team is close to completing an audio-visual aid with the help of a number of collaborators. A deeper study of the social and economic issues facing London's various Boroughs is also being carried out, and some possible sites have been identified. In the coming year the Team will start to develop relationships with relevant institutions and elicit the support of planning authorities. Much remains to be achieved and the continued prayers of the whole community for confirmations to surround the project are welcomed.



Construction work has progressed throughout the year on (top row, left to right) the National Houses of Worship for Papua New Guinea and the Democratic Republic of Congo, and (bottom row, left to right) the Local Houses of Worship in Tanna, Vanuatu; Matunda Soy, Kenya; and Bihar Sharif, India.

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## 7. Other areas of activity

### 7.1 National Bahá'í Archives and Library

In *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi lists the Archives and the Library among the “component parts” of the important “institution of the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds—the seat of the Bahá'í National Assembly and pivot of all Bahá'í administrative activity in future.”

Efforts to further develop the National Spiritual Assembly's archival and library systems were somewhat hampered this year by the lockdown restrictions. Sadly, it was not possible to create an opportunity for the friends to view any of the precious archival items, nor for members of the Archives Task Force to continue their work of cataloguing. However, when it became possible, a professional museum-quality scanning company spent three days at 27 Rutland Gate completing the scanning of the English letters of the Beloved Guardian.

In the year ahead, it is hoped that significant advances will be made in the goal to have all important documents in the archives catalogued and scanned. Mrs. Mitra Shakibanejad, who served for many years in the International Bahá'í Archives, has now been employed by the National Assembly to catalogue and prepare for scanning the cables of Shoghi Effendi and other precious documents, including the Persian Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Miss Rozita Leatham has also been employed for a three-month period to complete the electronic cataloguing and organisation of the National Bahá'í Library which has been carried out by dedicated volunteers over the past few years.

It is hoped that, later during this sacred year dedicated to the memory of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, it will be possible for the friends to return to the Ḥazíratu'l-Quds to view some of the precious items from the collection associated with the Master.



The precious chair used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His visits to London has been immaculately restored during the past year and is now re-installed in the Council Chamber of the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds.

### 7.2 BASED-UK

The Bahá'í Agency for Social and Economic Development –United Kingdom [BASED-UK] was registered as a charity by the National Spiritual Assembly in 1993. It is partnered, by the Bahá'í International Development Organization at the World Centre, with Bahá'í-inspired organisations around the world, assisting them by channelling financial resources to them. These partner programmes are the Bayan Association in Honduras, the Mongolia Development Centre [MDC] and the Setsimbiso Sebunye Foundation [SSF] in Eswatini.

Grants from four Trusts totalling £12,000 were received during the year, and the charity's first corporate sponsorship from a Bahá'í-inspired social enterprise was also very welcome. An

application was submitted to the Government’s UK Aid Direct Fund in September 2020 to support the work of SSF, though the official funding decision has been delayed. For the financial year ending 31 March 2020, the total charity income was £79,166 and expenditure £74,178.

During the year under review, BASED-UK engaged with a wide variety of supporters, which was reflected in its Annual General Meeting’s highest attendance for many years. More than 20 friends attended and it was particularly inspiring to hear moving personal accounts from staff at the MDC and the SSF about the challenges they have faced supporting children and families, and maintaining their work in the face of pandemic-related lockdowns. A pre-recorded video message was also received from Honduras.



BASED-UK’s Annual General Meeting, 19 September 2020

A welcome initiative involved the design of cards from the pre-school children in Eswatini (pictured below). Print costs for the cards were generously covered by a volunteer and they will be available for sale via the BASED-UK website and social media with proceeds earmarked for SSF. Meetings with Bahá’í development practitioners are ongoing to find more effective ways of fundraising.





## 7.3 Communications and publications



Communicating effectively remains a subject for the National Spiritual Assembly's regular consultation and learning. Aside from the traditional means by which the National Assembly shares messages, guidance and information, the particular circumstances of the past year has required the consideration of numerous other platforms and methods by which the friends could connect with each other and reach out to their family members, neighbours and community of interest. One particular concern for the National Assembly continues to be how it can communicate more effectively with the young people in the community. This is the subject of ongoing consultation and learning with groups of youth.

During the year, the UK Bahá'í NEWS email service reached its highest ever number of 3,100 subscribers. An average of six news items per month were sent out. Two editions of *UK Bahá'í* magazine were also produced, in September 2020 and March 2021. A total of 2,445 households continue to receive the printed magazine while around 150 readers access the electronic version. Each issue of the *UK Bahá'í*, which focuses on a major theme, is designed to be beautiful and informative, and suitable to be shared with friends.

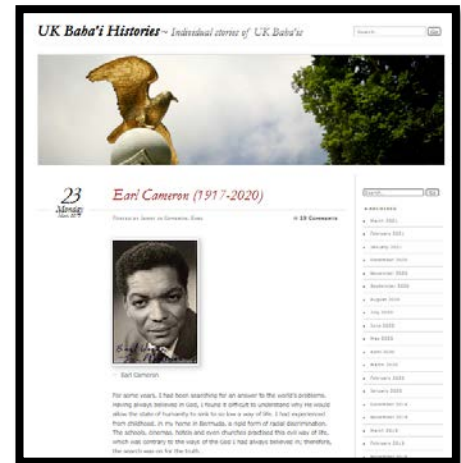
The National Assembly has also been keen to make use of video to ensure messages are received by individuals and communities. To this end, a special video was produced for the online gatherings that were organised in place of the Unit Conventions: [https://youtu.be/uIIS\\_yxuzA](https://youtu.be/uIIS_yxuzA). A tribute video was also produced for the national online memorial meeting on 22 November 2020 honouring Farzam Arbab and Douglas Martin, former members of the Universal House of Justice, and Violette Haake, former Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre: <https://youtu.be/WEXj-LHULcY>. The creativity evinced by the four Regional Bahá'í Councils and numerous other institutions, agencies and communities to create audio-visual resources for use at this year's online summer schools, teaching conferences and other Zoom gatherings, has been remarkable.

*Dayspring* magazine is now produced twice a year for children aged 5-12. This year, a new series of stories about the Fund was added at the request of the National Spiritual Assembly. Colour was also introduced throughout the magazine. Particular attention will be given this coming year to a special issue on the Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The pandemic created significant challenges for **Bahai Books UK**. The opportunities to sell literature at National Convention, summer schools and the Bahá'í Society for Persian Arts and Letters Conference were greatly missed. There was however an unprecedented demand for training institute materials as friends took the opportunity of lockdown to take part in online study circles. The usual orders of 5-10 per week jumped to 50-60 each day. As the warehouse had to close, an emergency plan was put into action with help from the Training Institute Board for England to move the Ruhi Books stock to the Bahá'í Training Centre, from where the service was able to continue. In the meantime, major work is being carried out to redesign and relaunch the Bahá'í Books UK website. Using the Shopify platform, this attractive site will make ordering

publications and institute materials much easier. More titles will also be made available in a range of formats, including ebooks, audio books, PDFs and via Web links. There will also be a more efficient method of processing orders and an automated system of dispatch and, for the first time, Persian and Arabic books will be included on the site. The National Spiritual Assembly is deeply grateful to its sister National Assembly in Australia which has kindly permitted the UK to make use of the newly developed system and templates for its own Bahá'í Distribution Service [BDS], and for providing the UK team with highly valued personal accompaniment from BDS's manager, Mr. Michael Cohen.

The **UK Bahá'í Histories Project** collects the personal stories of any believer with a connection to the history of the Faith in the United Kingdom, which are then published on the website <https://bahaihistoryuk.wordpress.com>. The exceptional circumstances of recent times have enabled a number of friends to find more time to devote to writing their stories. Some 27 new stories were published in the past year, bringing the total number on the site to 336. The website receives an average of 70 visits and 100 page views per day. The passing of the actor Earl Cameron in July 2020 generated a record number of 1,500 views in one day, as national news media sites linked to his story on the UK Bahá'í Histories site.

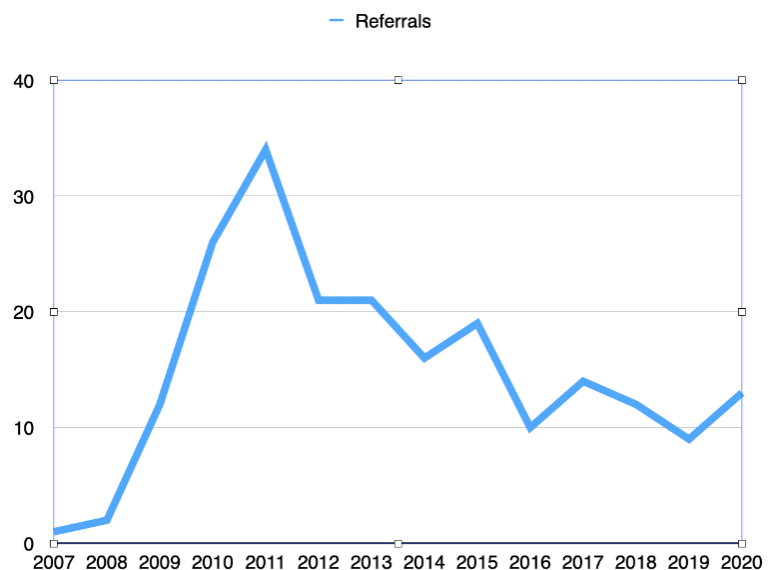


## 7.4 Community Care

The spiritual health and wellbeing of individuals and the community has been uppermost in the mind of the National Spiritual Assembly in the past few years. It has devoted much consultation time with the Counsellors to learning how to assist the believers to address challenges and develop distinctive spiritual habits and approaches that reflect the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Indeed, the National Assembly sees it as one of its key strategic areas of work and it has a number of learning objectives in place which it is striving to follow.

The National Assembly is deeply appreciative of the efforts of the Community Care Team [CCT] which assists and supports Assemblies and communities to provide the appropriate level of spiritual and personal care to members of the UK Bahá'í community experiencing difficulties.

The graph (right) shows the referral rate for Community Care Team cases at the end of 2020. At the time of writing, there are



29 active cases. These largely fall into the categories of mental health challenges and marital difficulties.

The Team is attempting to pilot several deepening programmes designed to help people struggling to overcome problematic patterns of behaviour.

### **- Chaplaincy**

Chaplaincy is an area of service that reflects our commitment to communities in which we live. Bahá'í chaplains do not focus on visiting other Bahá'ís in hospital, indeed responsibility for pastoral care of Bahá'ís falls to Local Spiritual Assemblies. Rather, they seek to serve those of all faiths and none.

Two meetings were held during the year with current and prospective chaplains. These have included Continuing Personal Development training, an update on our relationship with other chaplaincy groups and the NHS, and a focus on understanding the needs and abilities of friends we may meet, for example, those with dementia. Two members of the team represent the Faith on the Network for Pastoral, Spiritual, and Religious Care in Health. A Bahá'í also serves on the Chaplaincy Forum for Pastoral, Spiritual and Religious Care in Health, the umbrella body for chaplaincy associations and now the vehicle for any NHS funding.

### **- Office for Safeguarding Children**

The Office for Safeguarding Children [OSC] was established by the National Spiritual Assembly to ensure that those who work with children in children's classes, junior youth groups, residential schools, national conferences and conventions and elsewhere comply with the latest legal requirements and that the children in their care are afforded the safeguards that are their legal and moral right. With children's activities 'in person' not being possible this year, the OSC produced guidelines for the safeguarding of children in online activities. There have also been fewer applications for the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) this year.

Being unable to meet in person has slowed the process of appointing of Safeguarding Champions but some have been or are in the process of being appointed. In the coming year, it is hoped the role will become more clearly defined and recognised among the friends as a local source of guidance on safeguarding matters.

The OSC has been consulting with the Training Institute Board for England about how to raise awareness of safeguarding among institutions of the Faith at local and cluster level, as well as how to ensure those involved in children's activities are systematically informed about the Safeguarding policy and sources of information. Although we need to remain vigilant and ensure the online activities are following safeguarding guidelines, the current break in physical children and junior youth activities is an opportunity to consider how these can be implemented before these classes resume.

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## 7.5 Additional thanks

This year, every Bahá'í, every community and every institution of the Faith in the United Kingdom has had to adjust the ways in which they operate. The Bahá'í community's ability to adapt, continue and even considerably expand its activities has been remarkable. Short of interrupting initiatives under way, communities rapidly modified their efforts despite the restrictions. As a result, many victories have emerged out of this unprecedented global crisis.

So many friends, at every level—local, cluster, regional and national—give selflessly of their time, energy and financial resources to advance the work of the Cause. These also include the various review panels that ensure the accuracy and dignity of written and audio-visual publications by Bahá'ís; those who manage the national websites; those who provide services to the visually impaired; and those who have been gathering information on the graves of believers, including the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. Others attend to legal matters, the enrolment of asylum seekers, the annual production of the *In Memoriam* volume, answering correspondence from enquirers, serving as Marriage Officers in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and many other practical concerns that are vital to the functioning of our community.

*As we approach the centenary of the Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and of the inauguration of the Formative Age, the National Spiritual Assembly expresses its profound gratitude and love to every member of the United Kingdom Bahá'í community, for all of their sacrificial services.*





## 8. Bahá'í population statistics

Membership at Naw-Rúz 178 BE						
Region	Adults (DOB/31+)	Youth (15-30)	Junior Youth (11-14)	Children (5-11)	Babies (0-4)	Row Total
ENGLAND	3,781	791	147	187	66	4,972
SCOTLAND	398	88	13	14	13	526
WALES	248	35	8	7	8	306
NORTHERN IRELAND	192	47	2	10	7	258
FAROE ISLANDS	14	4	3	0	0	21
GIBRALTAR	8	3	2	0	0	13
CHANNEL ISLANDS	6	0	0	0	0	6
ISLE OF MAN	8	0	0	0	0	8
ADDRESS NOT KNOWN	1,666	109	6	3	0	1,784
Column Total	6,321	1,077	181	221	94	7,894

Status Changes between Naw-Rúz 177 and 178 BE							
Change	England	Scotland	Wales	Northern Ireland	Channel Isles - Isle of Man - other	address not known / other	Row Total
DECEASED	-59	-6	-4	-2		-11	-82
NEW ADULT ENROLMENT (OVER 21)	39	3	2	2			46
NEW YOUTH ENROLMENT (UNDER 21)	3						3
REGISTRATION OF BABY/CHILD	38	4	2	1			44
TRANSFER IN FROM ABROAD	72	11	3	4	2		92
TRANSFER OUT TO ABROAD							-95
WITHDRAWN							-35
Column Total	93	12	3	5	2	-11	-27

## 9. 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 176 B.E.

### Continental Board of Counsellors

Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi (*until 24 November 2020*)

Varqá Khadem (*since 25 November 2020*)

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

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

### Auxiliary Board Members – Propagation

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

### Auxiliary Board Members – Protection

Rafael Beberide	Gibraltar
David Foley	Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland
Farahnaz Khavari	North England, Isle of Man and Malta
Rachel Murray	Wales & Central England
Shirin Tahzib	South and South West England and the Channel Islands
Ashkan Ziaie	Scotland & Faroe Isles

*Noor Bell served the East of England until 15 October 2020;*

*Varqá Khadem served London and South East England until 24 November 2020*

### Regional Board of Ḥuqúqu'lláh for Ireland and the United Kingdom

**Deputies:** John McGill (Chair), Parvin Morrissey (Secretary), Paymen Sabeti, Farshid Taleb, Renoo Zaiwalla (Treasurer)

*Monica Eghrari Ghaem-Maghani served until 30 November 2020*

**Representatives:** Ciamh Aexander, Shahrayar Beheshti, Sarah Broun, Rachel Burnett, Declan Devine, Homeyra Doostdar-Smith, Erfan Fadaei, Judy Finlay, Sahar Freemantle, Nabil Helmy, Arran Kennedy, Thushara Latha Sodeyfi, Ruby Lagnado, Rob Lawton, Pamela Luque, Anne Maund, Niaz McGuire, Gita Meshki, Mojdeh Mohtadi, Umesh Samo Nakho, Diane Profaska, Saghar Saberian, Lona Sabeti, Ramez Salmanpour, Khatereh Shahriari Zavareh, Matthew Thompson, Neysan Vahdat, Khatereh Vahdat-Hagh, Nicholas Wilding, Anis Zeighamnia

*Daniel Alai and Sahar Rahmani served until June 2020, James Mohajer until November 2020, Karmel Rhinehart and Renoo Zaiwalla until December 2020.*

### **Regional Bahá'í Councils**

**England:** Stephen Agahi-Murphy (Chair), Shirin Beheshti (Secretary), Christopher Lee (Treasurer), Talieh Mann-Kapoor, Marco Milone, Natasha S. Wilkinson, Farshid Taleb, Stephen Vickers, Ronnie Y. Bindra (Vice-Chair)

**Aides:** Nirmala Cann, Alessia Freddo, Meenou Jones

**Northern Ireland:** Jamie Anderson (Vice-Chair), Ara Devine (Secretary), Isabella Djalili-Devine (Chair), Rhianna Giffin, Patricia Jamshidi (Treasurer)

*Edwin Graham served until 25 November 2020*

**Aide:** Klyne Peralta

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

**Scotland:** Allan Forsyth (Treasurer), Jessica Fusco-Naish (Vice-Chair), Karmel Rhinehart (Vice-Chair), Lua Rohani-Sarvestani (Secretary), Carrie Varjavandi (Chair)

*Diane Edwards and Sean Morrissey served until 25 November 2020*

**Aide:** Adrienne Crenshaw

**Wales:** Mathew James (Chair), Anita Keane, Munyaradzi Mumvuma (Treasurer), Genevieve Seri (Vice-Chair), Jonathan Whitehead (Secretary)

**Aide:** Anita Keane

*Tessa Abbas and Fleur Missaghian Schirazi served until 25 November 2020*

### **Training Institute Boards**

**England:** Carmel Afnan (Chair), Christine Boyett (Secretary), Joseph Cleasby, Julia Haviland (Treasurer), May Taleb (Vice-Chair)

**Aide:** Gita Meshki

**Covid-19 advice aides:** Baktash Khozoe, Kyan Pucks

**Safeguarding aide:** Mehrafagh Kalani

**Ruhi materials aide:** Gita Aminpour

**Scotland:** Siria Rutstein (Chair), Richard Fusco (Secretary), John Chan (Treasurer)

**Wales:** Rachel Murray (Secretary/Treasurer), Munyaradzi Mumvuma (Chair)

**Ruhi Book 8 coordinator:** Sam Roskams

**Learning Desk:** Soraya Sanatian

### **National Statistics**

**National Statistics Officer:** Eric Harshfield

**Assistant to the National Statistics Officer:** Alessia Freddo

### **Communications and publications**

**UK Bahá'í:** Sophie Gregory, Rozita Leatham, Charlie Leith (designer), Alexander Murray, Foad Saberian (printing), Shirin Taherzadeh

**UK Persian Translation Team:** Coorous Mohtadi-Haghighi, Mojdeh Mohtadi-Haghighi, Soraya Hamed-Nasirizadeh

**Dayspring:** Maggie Manvell, Jackie Mehrabi

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

## Literature

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

## Marriage officers

**Northern Ireland:** Susan Agahi-Esfahani, Robert Elliot, Patricia Irvine (Chief marriage officer), Luke Kingham, Claire Parris

**Scotland:** Gohar Beint, Andrew Goodwin, Rickey Pooran, Mhairi Schmidt, Anwen Shahim-Aeen

## Other

**National Archives Task Force:** Manijeh Afnán-Murray, Sholeh Magzub-Afnan, Irène Momtaz-Afridi, Lesley Taherzadeh O'Mara, Mehrjahan Yazhari.

**National Bahá'í Library:** Christine Beer, Pat Beer, Rozita Leatham

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

## Personal Affairs

**Community Care Team:** Barbara Gilbert, Nirvana Habibi, Peter Hulme (Coordinator), Clare Whitehead

**Office for Safeguarding Children:** Geoff Ault, Sue Cave, Diane Cleasby, June Gumsley, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Paula Withers (Coordinator)

**Chaplaincy Coordination Team:** Elizabeth Coleman, Elizabeth Jenkerson (Secretary), Kaykhosrov Manuchehri, Gerald Williams

## Personnel

**Staffing Committee:** Ala Haddad, Shahab Meshki, National Spiritual Assembly Treasurer, Mary Watson

## Pioneering

**UK Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee:** Andisheh Namvari, Karen O'Donoghue, Gopi Shanmuganathan, Anne Wong, Cameron Yazdi-Green

## Properties

**Committee for the Care of the Guardian's Resting Place:** Roya Azordegan, Soheyl Azordegan (Secretary), Gita Meshki, Foad Rahimi

**Custodians:** Roya Azordegan, Soheyl Azordegan

**Grounds keeper:** Iman Bahrani

**Care of Bahá'í Graves in the UK:** Miaad Al-Obeidli, Nigel Austin-Weeks, Joan Birch, Alan Campbell, Ian Digby (registrar), Naomi McFadden

**Graves of Knights of Bahá'u'lláh:** Thelma Batchelor, Catherine Watson

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

**Bahá'í Properties Working Group:** Ron Batchelor, Nooshafarin Birch, Sean Fehilly, Dana Haqjoo, Sohrab Samari, Gopi Shanmuganathan, Saeed Shahim-Aeen (Coordinator), Anthony Sherwani, Homan Varghaei

**Bahá'í Training Centre Management Team:** Manijeh Akhondi-Smith, Tamsin Allesbrook, Juda Caprez, Layli Semple, David Smith

**Centre hosts:** Manijeh Akhondi-Smith, David Smith

**Edinburgh Bahá'í Centre:** Joanna Keenan, Nasrin O'Kane, Siria Rutstein, Lesley Taherzadeh O'Mara, Carrie Varjavandi



**Temple Land Acquisition Project Team:** Paul Caprez, Sam Roskams, Sara Talai  
**Committee for the Refurbishment of 17 Royal York Crescent:** Soroush Fadaei, Nourah Said Fikri-Ziaie, Lesley Taherzadeh O'Mara

**Custodians:** Nahid Donald, Ross Donald

**Windsor 'Hub' local project management team:** Edwin Graham (Coordinator), Tasha McCabe, Marzena Mikolajczyk, Aleksandrs Saprikins

### Review Panels

**Academic Review Panel:** Nazila Ghanea (Coordinator), Nabil Khabirpour, Saba Tahzib, Daniel Wheatley

**Audio-Visual Review Panel:** Margaret Appa (Coordinator), Thelma Batchelor, Meenou Jones, Simin Liggitt, Margaret Love, Ahlam Mirzai, Christine Wagg

**Literature Review Panel:** Peter Hulme (Coordinator), Daniel Alai, Margaret Appa, Vivian Bartlett, Khazeh Fananapazir, Janet Fleming Rose, Jeremy Fox, Helen Hellaby, John Lester, Paul Mahony, Beverley Matthews, David Merrick, Coorous Mohtadi, Iain Palin, Padideh Sabeti, Rosanna Smith, Carolyn Sparey-Fox, Jessica Tahghighi, Collis Tahzib, Ismail Velasco, Rebecca Vickers, Mary Victoria, Graham Walker, Arthur Weinberg

**Special Panel for Persian memoirs:** Padideh Sabeti, Mary Victoria, Daniel Wheatley

**Special Panel for sensitive subjects:** Vivian Bartlett, Coorous Mohtadi, Collis Tahzib

### Schools, scholarship and education

**Association for Bahá'í Studies:** Khatereh Eghdamian, Carmel Irandoust, Iqan Shahidighamsari, Collis Tahzib

**Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education:** Nazila Ghanea, Arman Mohajeri

**Bahá'í Society for Persian Arts and Letters Committee:**

**Logistics Committee:** Mehrdad Kalani (Secretary), Mehrafagh Kalani, Farzad Mohebati, Mariam Partovi-Fallah

**Programme Committee:** Homeyra Doostdar-Smith (Secretary), Nazila Ghanea, Sobhan Sorourian, Arman Mohajeri

**Office for the network of sites for learning for the Junior Youth Spiritual**

**Empowerment Programme in Western Europe:** [not appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly] Jenna Tahzib

### Legal matters

**Incorporations Officer:** Declan Howlett

### Others

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

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

**Birth certificates:** Diane Ashmore, Carolyn Moss, Sapphire Richardson

**COVID-19 advisory group:** Saba Alai-South, Darren Howell, Michael Vander-Pallen, Patricia Williams

**Events and Logistics Committee:** Nigel Austin-Weeks, Shahram Eshraghi-Yazdi, Ahlam Mirzai, Shailesh Shah, Peter Sweet (Secretary), Stephen Thompson, Shahram Ziaie

**IT Steering Committee:** Shoa Aminpour, Louis Hayati, Martin Rainsford, Vafa Ram, Anthony Ridler, Nadim Rohani, Farzin Shakibanejad, Charlie Wong

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

**National Convention Arrangements Committee:** Danesch Missaghian-Shirazi

(Coordinator), Shahab Meshki, Tony Ridler, Shahram Ziaie (Registrar)

**Pilgrimage Desk:** Farahnaz Mahony, Paul Mahony

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

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

### **Not appointed by the National Spiritual Assembly**

**Afnan Library trustees:** Robert Balyuzi, Payam Foroudi, Erica Leith, Moojan Momen, National Secretary.

**BASED-UK trustees:** Helena Hastie, National Secretary, Arezoo Farahzad, Mark Habibi, Paul Caprez

**ISGP Coordinating Team:** Munirih Shah, Mathew James, Ashkan Ziaie

**Regional (Europe) ISGP Coordinating Team:** Stephen Agahi-Murphy, Mahyar Nicoubin



Above: Bahá'í Training Centre, Lower Arcott, Oxfordshire

Below: The Afnan Library, Sandy, Bedfordshire



## 10. Staff and volunteers of the National Ḥazíratu'l-Quds

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



### Office of the Secretary

**Staff:** Patria Aquino, Clive Polden, Evan Walker, Mary Watson (Coordinator)

### Office of the Treasurer

**Staff:** Arhinful Ansah, Arnel Lejano, Dumazi Volontiya (Coordinator)  
**Volunteers:** Fareba Jones, Hoshmand Kalami, Ardeshir Laloui, John Stuart Lester, Shailesh Shah, Barbara Stanley-Hunt

### Office of Public Affairs

**Coordinating team:** Sophie Gregory, Padideh Sabeti (Convenor), Karl Wightman  
**Staff:** Daniel Wheatley  
**Collaborators:** Max Afnan, Payvand Agahi, Kian Altman, Sam Davies, Angela Dennis, Omid Djalili, Kat Eghdamian, Alan Forsyth, Nazila Ghanea, Layla Grainger, May Hayati, Tebby Hinton, Ian Holland, Elizabeth Jenkerson, Bernardo Kerr, Charlie Leith, Edit McCathie, Moojan Momen, Nabil Rastani, Rosita Riazati, Siria Rutstein, Rayyan Sabet, Erfan Sabeti, Riaz Sanatian, Iqan Shahidi, Maureen Sier, Lindsay Thorne, Anousha Vahdaty, Saleem Vaillancourt, Stephen Vickers, Amarr Wright  
**Membership of RE Task Force:** Carolyn Ault, Arzhia Habibi, Sam Taylor, Debbie Tibbey, Stephen Vickers, Karl Wightman

### Information Services Department

**Staff:** Louis Hayati, Payam Naghdi, Tony Ridler (Coordinator)  
**Volunteers:** Ian Alden, Shoa Aminpour, Shihab Borumand, Alan Brown, Sana Donald, Ardawan Laloui, Sina Rahmani, Martin Rainsford, Nadim Rohani, Farzin Shakibanejad, Ian Vink, Charlie Wong

### Department of Services

**Staff:** Shirin Jisha (Records), Shahab Meshki (Coordinator), Farzaneh Seegoolam (Custodian until December 2020)  
**Data Protection/GDPR:** Michael Hainsworth, Shahab Meshki  
**Hospitality and bookshop volunteers:** Tahereh Ansari Azari, Soltan Azizi, Mona Findlay, Sina Hakimian, Mali Hassani, Shireen Hurkoo, Hoshmand Kalami, Faranak Majidi, Aline Solomon, Mercedes Teresa-Ferreira  
**27 Rutland Gate maintenance volunteers:** John Cooper, Mehran Ighany, Bizhan Jalalian, Hamid Modaressi Fard, Farhad Mojgan, Shamim Saadat, Saeed Shahim, Abbas Towfigh, Paul Walker



