

Annual Report

2012–13



It should be remembered that the Bahá'í children's class teacher and the junior youth group animator, entrusted with so much responsibility for strengthening the moral foundations of the community, will, in most places, be a young person in his or her teens. Increasingly these young people will emerge, it can be expected, from the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme imbued with a strong twofold purpose, both to develop their inherent potentialities and to contribute to the transformation of society. But they may also come from any one of a number of educational backgrounds with all the hope in their hearts that, through strenuous concerted effort, the world will change. Irrespective of particulars, they will, one and all, share in the desire to dedicate their time and energy, talents and abilities, to service to their communities. Many, when given the opportunity, will gladly devote a few years of their lives to the provision of spiritual education to the rising generations. In the young people of the world, then, lies a reservoir of capacity to transform society waiting to be tapped. And the release of this capacity should be regarded by every institute as a sacred charge.

Universal House of Justice

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

1. EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION

A. INTRODUCTION – ADVANCING THE PROCESS OF ENTRY BY TROOPS

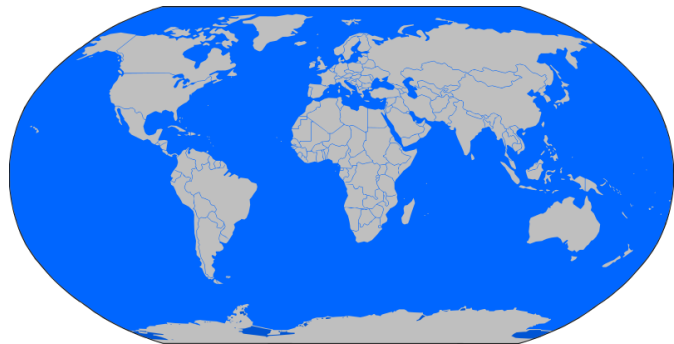
The Bahá'í world community is engaged in a mission that transcends anything that humanity has aspired to in times past; its aim is the “the founding of a world civilisation and culture”; its goal is nothing less than the unification of the whole world. Bahá'u'lláh writes that “the object of every Revelation” is nothing less than “to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind”. The Universal House of Justice explains that “transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh ... souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained.”

Mankind has been building towards this moment since the beginning of time.

Each generation of Bahá'ís makes its own unique and distinct contribution towards the realisation of this goal. This generation is charged with achieving one major accomplishment - to make “a significant advance in the process of entry by troops”.

The House of Justice in its 1996 Ridván message stated that “such an advance is to

be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community”. The House of Justice continued that, having “spiritually and mentally accepted the possibility” of entry by troops, the Bahá'í community must



then work “towards embracing masses of new believers, setting in motion the means for effecting their spiritual and administrative training and development, thereby multiplying the number of knowledgeable, active teachers and administrators whose involvement in the work of the Cause will ensure a constant influx of new adherents, an uninterrupted evolution of Bahá'í Assemblies, and a steady consolidation of the community...”

This generation is charged with achieving one major accomplishment - to make “a significant advance in the process of entry by troops”.

Thus, all that we are presently doing within the framework of the current Five Year Plan is contributing towards this overarching objective - **advancing the process of entry by troops**, with its twin inseparable aspects of **expansion and consolidation**. This is the mission of our generation.

Since 1996, the Bahá'í world has been developing the **instrument of the training institute** as a means of advancing this process. It can now, some 17 years later, be described as “an instrument

of limitless potentialities”, “a potent instrument for spiritually empowering the masses of humanity to take charge of their own destiny”. It is the means of enabling “thousands, nay millions, to study the writings in small groups with the explicit purpose of translating the Bahá’í teachings into reality”. It is through the core activities that this effort is given meaning and expression; activities described as “meetings that strengthen the devotional character of the community; classes that nurture the tender hearts and minds of children; groups that channel the surging energies of junior youth; circles of study, open to all, that enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of the teachings to their individual and collective lives.”

It is through the core activities that this effort is given meaning and expression

With the establishment of the training institute, the House of Justice tells us in its 28 December 2010 message that it is now, “possible for an expanding nucleus of individuals to generate a movement towards the goal of a new World Order” and “to conceive of the movement of a population ... in term of a rich and dynamic continuum.” Along this continuum and within the setting of a cluster, it describes **two specific milestones** on the path of a programme leading to growth. With this description, we are learning more deeply how the process of entry by troops should unfold within any cluster, no matter what its stage of development. The following describes the first milestone along this path 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.

The goal of the UK Bahá’í community for the Five Year Plan is that **every cluster should have a programme of growth established**. The following paragraph describes the second milestone along this continuum or path.

Within this landscape of unfolding processes, emerging structures, and enduring fellowship, that moment which has come to be known as the “launching” of an intensive programme of growth represents conscious recognition that all the elements necessary to accelerate the expansion and consolidation of the Faith are not only in place but also functioning with an adequate degree of effectiveness. It signals the maturation of an ever-expanding, self-sustaining system for the spiritual edification of a population: a steady stream of friends is proceeding through the courses of the training institute and engaging in the corresponding



activities, which serves, in turn, to increase the number of fresh recruits into the Faith, a significant percentage of whom invariably enters the institute process, guaranteeing the expansion of the system. This constitutes another milestone that the friends labouring in every cluster must, in time, reach.

The above gives an indication of **two vantage points** from which we can view the Bahá'í community's efforts to advance the process of entry by troops – the perspective of the educational process driven by the training institute and the perspective of the expansion and consolidation of the community aimed at increasing the numbers of fresh recruits into the Faith and those engaged in the activities of the Plan. The following sections of the annual report will thus look through the lens of each of these, remembering that **“both perspectives are equally valid; each offers a particular way of thinking and speaking about what is taking place.”**

B. THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

Let us first survey the last year through the vantage point of the **educational process**—the **“engine of growth”** and the means by which ever-growing numbers can connect with the teachings of God for this day and learn potent and meaningful ways in which to apply them.

Some **notable victories** have been won in the last year. Our heightened ability in some localities to expand numbers in children's classes, an increase in the intensive training of youth, and the community's rising desire to assist in advancing the work with the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme are all significant steps forward, and strengths on which to build further. Experience in the transition between children's classes to junior youth groups to study circles is growing. Our understanding of the true nature of “veritable friendships” is helping to

Our understanding of the true nature of “veritable friendships” is helping to remove barriers in the community's understanding of “universal participation”

remove barriers in the community's understanding of “universal participation”, and the increased involvement of the community of interest in the implementation of the educational process is an area of learning that is expanding our field of vision and understanding. Indeed, the overall number of participants in core activities – **1,481, or 44% of the total participants in core activities** – is truly a wonderful foundation on which to build!

However, **the level of activity associated with the training institute has remained broadly similar to previous years**, and this suggests there is still a great deal to learn about growth and how to use the sequence of courses to enable ever-increasing numbers to teach effectively and to enter into the field of service.

Study Circles and Human resources

Completed	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4	Book 5	Book 6	Book 7	Book 8.1
Beginning 5YP	2755	2102	1750	1666	569	1232	1035	84
Apr 11-Sep 11	434	232	190	138	45	146	84	57
Oct 11 - Mar 12	148	95	72	31	36	32	34	76
Apr 12 -Sep 12	176	75	64	29	53	22	33	106
Oct 12 – Mar 13	92	42	40	29	33	16	2	74
Total	3605	2546	2116	1893	736	1448	1188	397

The ability of the community to help individuals who are committed to a process of transformation through the sequence of courses is a key indicator of the community's capacity. The pyramid of training in recent years suggests that **the pace of growth is slowing**, with generally fewer people completing each book every 6 months. To some extent, this may be because in some clusters a plateau is reached as Bahá'ís, who still make up the majority of study circle participants, finish moving through the sequence.



Levels of tutoring, and the ability to invite Bahá'ís and others alike to join study circles, is another vital indicator of the community's capacity.

	Tutors	Study Circles	Participants	Comm. of Interest
Oct-09	nia	267	729	286
Apr-10	nia	355	1104	322
Oct-10	nia	352	1058	346
Apr-11	nia	352	1043	351
Oct-11	1119	319	972	290
Apr-12	1153	302	852	307
Oct-12	1186	263	754	251
Apr-13	1188	306	917	270

From this table we can extract the following key information:

- **The UK has nearly 1200 trained tutors**
- **With many study circles being co-tutored, perhaps 1 in 3 are actively tutoring**
- **There are on average 3 participants per study circle, excluding tutors**
- **2 in 7 participants are seekers**

As indicated in the graph above, the number of individuals from **the community of interest participating in study circles is generally declining**. We know too that fewer of those who complete book 1 are moving through the sequence. Some questions that come to mind when considering these challenges include:

- The institute is "the mainstay of the community's efforts to advance the Plan". Are we understanding and using this training, not as a means of teaching or deepening, but as "the means for enabling an ever-rising number of individuals to strengthen their capacity for service"?
- Are we able to work together to ensure that "as early as possible, skills and abilities developed through participation in institute courses are deployed in the field..." and that "Growing numbers arise to shoulder responsibility, swelling the ranks of those who serve as tutors, animators, and teachers of children; who administer and coordinate; or who otherwise labour in support of the work."?
- How are we using the knowledge, insights and skills developed by the Institute to teach the Cause and develop community life?
- How can we ensure that the institute courses are not seen as an end in themselves?



Building the capacity of youth

Although the potential for the training institute to grow rapidly has not yet been realised, there are some positive developments! Among these is the **intensive training of youth**, which is indicative of the community's increasing effectiveness in mobilising youth and has been crucial in the Training Institute Board's efforts to tap the "reservoir of capacity to transform society" that is latent within Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í youth alike.

Over the summer and winter period of 2012, **178 individuals attended intensive training**, many of whom completed two courses of the Ruhi Institute. The summer training was followed by projects across England overseen by the Regional Bahá'í Council and planned and implemented by the Institutions serving at the Cluster level. These provided an opportunity for the youth involved in the training to further develop their spiritual capacities for service in the context of **teaching and community-building at the grassroots**.

London Youth Conference 2013

In this connection, of course, the **London Youth Conference**, one of a series of 114 youth conferences called for by the Universal House of Justice, which is, at the time of writing this report, planned to take place over the weekend of 26-28 July next, will be a landmark. The youth have been summoned by the Supreme Body, in its letter of 8 February 2013, thus:

To every generation of young believers comes an opportunity to make a contribution to the fortunes of humanity, unique to their time of life. For the present generation, the

moment has come to reflect, to commit, to steel themselves for a life of service from which blessings will flow in abundance.

As we write this report, efforts are being made up and down the UK to reach out to every Bahá'í youth in the age range of 15 to 30 years through home visits, youth gatherings and so forth, urging them to participate in this movement of **tens of thousands of youth across the planet who are arising to play their unique part**. The Bahá'í youth, in turn, are engaging in conversations with their friends, colleagues and co-workers in the field of service and encouraging them to participate.

The conference should not, of course, be seen as an isolated event; it is part of a process of raising the capacity of youth, broadening their understanding and sharpening their vision of the opportunities before them for service in their local communities and to humanity as a whole.

As part of this process, the Training Institute Board is planning for this summer a less centralised approach to the intensive training of youth in which there will be **two simultaneous training events taking place in Thames Valley and Greater Manchester**. It is envisaged that the training at these events will involve a particular focus on service in the field, and will relate closely to the grassroots activity that is taking place in two of the UK's most advanced clusters. Many other clusters are also arranging intensive training for youth both prior to and following the London youth conference, as well as teaching projects, which will give further impetus to the movement of youth in the UK.

... this conference is pivotal to the progress of the Five Year Plan and ... can be an instrument for transforming the fortunes of this country

However, what is of the utmost importance is that the youth, when they return to their home communities, are closely accompanied such that each and every one of them has the opportunity to fulfil their undoubted desire to make their “contribution to the fortunes of humanity, unique to their time of life, fulfilling the mission of their generation.”

The National Spiritual Assembly is of the view that this conference is pivotal to the progress of the Five Year Plan and, if we take full advantage of it, can be an instrument for transforming the fortunes of this country. A question that is worthy of addressing is:

- How can the UK Bahá'í community maximise this opportunity to engage youth, both those from within the community and those from the wider society who are close to the Faith or interested in engaging in its community-building activities?

Channelling the surging energies of junior youth...

In a consultation last August with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi and Miss Clare O'Brien, the Northern European Resource person from the junior youth learning site at the Stan Wrout cluster in Limerick, Ireland, a greater understanding was reached as to the potential of the 11-14 age group and the potency of the **junior youth spiritual empowerment programme**. This inspired the National Assembly to encourage the community to give particular attention to the

programme. Indeed, the very purpose of the regional gatherings referred to above was to **build understanding within the participants of the importance of the programme and its place in the overall educational process**. There is good reason for this focus, which is perhaps best explained by the following extract from a letter dated 14 November 2012 of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly:

The merit of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme lies, first and foremost, in its effectiveness at enhancing the power of expression and the quality of spiritual perception within its participants and in assisting them to develop the capabilities necessary for a life of meaningful service to their communities. Repeated accounts from officials, parents, and young people themselves testify to the power of the programme to shape character and bring forth the praiseworthy qualities latent in junior youth. Yet, even more, the benefits of the programme are experienced in every stage of the educational process in which the Bahá'í community is engaged, as well as in the scheme of community building in which the spiritual empowerment programme is embedded. By multiplying vibrant junior youth groups, a community learns a great deal about, for instance, how capable human resources are increased and deployed; how capacity for service is raised within cohorts of individuals; how an expanding programme can be effectively coordinated; and how initiating one activity can, quite naturally, lead to the emergence of others. And as a consequence of the organic unfoldment of the educational process and the participants' ongoing spiritual and moral development, all facets of the growth programme are, in time, extended and enhanced.

In Wales ... around 10% of the entire Bahá'í population are now or will soon be involved in receiving animator training...

Following the 7 regional gatherings held in January, there has been an encouraging **rise in activity associated with the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme** throughout the UK. Many friends who had not previously considered it are now welcoming the opportunity to study book 5 with a view to understanding better, and finding their place in helping to expand, the programme. In Wales, for example, around 10% of the entire Bahá'í population are now or will soon be involved in receiving animator training, many of whom are keen to animate! And the rise in enthusiasm is being translated into action.

Initiating a junior youth group

In one neighbourhood in Manchester, a small team endeavoured to start a junior youth group. Through a month of daily conversations with local individuals they met five junior youth, but none wished to attend the group. However, after **reflecting on the nature of the conversations they were having**, the team decided to focus on **building friendship with the junior youth**. They spent time in places where they could naturally interact with the junior youth through, for example, playing football, and in this way the **barriers of mistrust were removed** and the team was able to introduce the programme successfully. The team then went on to meet the families of the junior youth to explore the purpose of the programme. Through natural home visits – neighbours simply meeting neighbours – they established a close relationship with the families and, as a result, attendance to the group rapidly rose!

Working with junior youth in the immediate neighbourhood has great benefits: interactions are frequent and often informal, conversations can happen as easily in the street or on the way to a shop as through visits, and trusting friendship is naturally built between the animators, the junior youth and their families.

At the same time, those already involved in animating are learning with increasing effectiveness **how to sustain junior youth groups**. This is indicated by the increase in numbers studying higher books in the programme. Such sustainability is no doubt the fruit of a **rise in quality**, as more and more animators learn what it means to engage young adolescents in a programme that seeks to help them navigate through the unsettled and character-defining age of 11-14, and empower them to become purposeful protagonists of change.

What is more, it is gratifying to see that efforts to **invite youth from the wider community to serve as animators** are becoming more widespread. This is a crucial development. In addition, learning has been generated concerning **the dynamics of junior youth groups at the neighbourhood level** and how they can help to reach out to new junior youth as well as identify service opportunities close to their homes, as this example illustrates:

Impact in a neighbourhood

There is a junior youth group in one neighbourhood in central London that has an average of 10 junior youth that attend. They all come from a two minute walk radius around where the group takes place. They either live in the same building as the animator, the building opposite or a street off the side of the building. The junior youth group is well known in the small area and is supported by the wider community—the group and their projects are mentioned in a local newsletter, and the positive word of mouth is even contributing to the expansion of the group! As a result of the efforts of the group being focused on their immediate surroundings the junior youth can really see the effect of their efforts on their neighbourhood, and gain a lot from that. The families in the neighbourhood are really appreciating the positive effect that this group has for their area, and have begun sending younger children -10 year olds on the verge of being 11- to the group, and as a result another activity has begun: a ‘pre junior youth group children’s class’, which will become a junior youth group in the summer.

At present, the programme is reaching around 320 junior youth with about 2 out of 3 participants coming from the wider community. It is of course a great strength that the programme is being offered so openly, and this augurs well for the coming year! Yet challenges remain. Despite these many advances, the overall number of Junior Youth Groups in UK has been stable in recent years, fluctuating around 65-70.

...the programme is reaching 320 junior youth with 2 out of 3 participants coming from the wider community.

	Animators	JYG's	Participants	Comm. Of Interest
Oct-10	n/a	64	344	267
Apr-11	n/a	67	340	231
Oct-11	614	71	345	251
Apr-12	650	65	318	224
Oct-12	703	61	350	245
Apr-13	736	69	319	206

From this table, we can see the following:

- **Average group size: 4.6 participants, of which 3 come from the community of interest.**
- **Approximately 18% of people trained in book 5 are animating (assuming two trained animators per group).**

Nurturing tender hearts and minds...

The number of **children's classes** in the UK has been stable in recent years, fluctuating at around 110 classes. Likewise, the number of children attending and the ratio of children coming from non-Bahá'í families has remained broadly similar to previous years. Nevertheless, significant efforts have been made in some areas to increase the mobilisation of teachers, and these are beginning to yield fruit. Assuming 2 children's class teachers per class, just over 10% of people trained in Book 3 (a total 2116) are actively teaching children's classes.

	Teachers	Children's classes	Participants	Comm. Of Interest
Apr-10	n/a	130	502	251
Oct-10	n/a	110	441	257
Apr-11	n/a	106	418	229
Oct-11	1940	117	458	235
Apr-12	2012	120	516	288
Oct-12	2076	107	483	284
Apr-13	2116	110	485	274

Helping new children’s class teachers arise

A teacher had been conducting a class with the aid of a youth from the community of interest, however the youth was no longer able to assist with the class as they acquired a new job. To ensure the class could keep going with two teachers, the teacher approached someone within the community who had clearance to work with children, but not much experience teaching classes. This soul graciously accepted to help with the class and it became immediately clear to the teacher that this individual was excellent with teaching children, forming strong relationships with them and dedicated to identifying the hidden gems within them. This individual has now run the class on their own, made visits and is actively reflecting with various people about the development of the class and the children.

At a later date, this same class needed to be split into two because of the age difference in the children and the growing demand to join the class. Again, the teacher (running two classes) needed to find a second person, to abide by child protection requirements. A friend asked whether they could bring a child to the class from a non-Baha'i family and they just happened to have their child protection clearance. Although initially saying that they didn't want to teach the class, they have now requested the Grade 1 materials so they can follow the classes, help with establishing discipline and encourage the children in what they do. Little by little this friend is taking on aspects of teaching a class.

... a wonderful means by which friendships are formed among parents and young children alike!

...a number of alterations have been made in an endeavour to strengthen the scheme of coordination...

More training is required in the use of Grade 2 and 3 children’s class materials. However, **reflection and planning** is occurring regularly in some parts of the country, and further experience is being gained around the use of Grade 2 materials.

Looking ahead it will be fascinating to see the difference that participation in the children’s classes and junior youth groups makes on those who enter the sequence of courses of the Ruhi Institute. Indeed, already we can see the positive outcome in a few settings around the UK.

In addition to children’s classes, **toddlers’ classes**, for those aged roughly 2-4, continue in a number of clusters with participation from the community of interest. Many have gone on to become children’s classes, and they are proving be a wonderful means by which friendships are formed among parents and young children alike!



Coordination

Coordinators across the UK are endeavouring to increase the quality of their respective activities, aware as they are that “sustained quantitative gains will be contingent on qualitative progress”. They are holding **gatherings and encounters** to reflect and to facilitate the exchange of learning among themselves and with those in their respective areas who are engaged in the core activities. Many are learning how to **visit and plan activities** with individuals, to **accompany them in the field of service**, and to **reflect** with them in order to help them become ever-more effective in their service. The coordinators are also learning about the significance of **collaboration** across their spheres of service and the need to see the educational process as a whole.

Over the year, a number of alterations have been made in an endeavour to strengthen the scheme of coordination for study circles, junior youth groups and children’s classes.

- **Two-year terms of appointment** are being introduced, where appropriate, to give coordinators a stronger sense of structure and intensity to their service.
- The **geographical areas** in which some regional and sub-regional coordinators operate have been amended to lend greater focus to their services, with many of these coordinators now accompanying all the cluster coordinators—for children’s classes, junior youth groups and study circles—in their respective areas.
- In addition, **the process of appointing cluster coordinators has been given greater local autonomy** in order to be more responsive to local needs, and to build capacity at the local level to understand and articulate those needs.

C. INCREASING THE NUMBERS OF FRESH RECRUITS INTO THE FAITH AND THOSE ENGAGED IN THE ACTIVITIES OF THE PLAN.

Programmes of growth

Programmes of growth, as defined by the attainment of at least the first milestone as described by the House of Justice, lie at the heart of the transformative process in which the Bahá’í community is engaged. As the National Spiritual Assembly announced at the commencement of the plan, it is

the goal of the community to have a programme of growth established in every cluster in the UK.

This goal needs to be fulfilled by the end of the Five Year Plan at Ridván 2016. To date, programmes of growth have been initiated in 30 clusters and these are continuing to gather momentum.

	Total No. of clusters	of these	No. of Clusters with a Programme of Growth
TOTAL	50	-----	30
Scotland	10	-----	5
Wales	4	-----	2
N.Ireland	4	-----	2
England	32	-----	21
STATUS OF CLUSTERS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AT NAW-RUZ 2013			

Thus, programmes of growth also need to begin in some **11 additional clusters** in order to achieve the commitment that was given to the House of Justice.

...programme of growth can be initiated through one believer's conversations...

How might this goal be attained? The House of Justice assures us that a programme of growth can be initiated through one believer's conversations, and there is no doubt that the concerted efforts of the friends in those clusters will be confirmed. However, the responsibility for meeting this goal rests with the UK community as a whole. In this context, let us consider the

opportunities open to believers to arise as **homefront and overseas pioneers** to serve in clusters where a programme of growth has yet to be initiated, or indeed to move to a more advanced cluster to support and strengthen the work already underway.

The House of Justice emphasizes, in its message of 23 May 2011, that “the movement of pioneers remains an indispensable feature of the spiritual enterprise in which the community of the Most Great Name is engaged”. Within England, the Council has been collaborating with the **UK Pioneering and Travel Teaching Committee**—a new committee formed to respond to the requirements of the Plan—and has identified the London, Manchester and Thames Valley clusters in particular as being “reservoirs of pioneers who can be dispatched to other clusters, especially on the home front”.

The National Spiritual Assembly hopes that **conversations around the theme of pioneering** will increasingly become part of the consultations that are taking place within families, study circles, reflection meetings, Assembly meetings, Nineteen-Day Feasts and wherever the friends are consulting on advancing the growth and development of their clusters.

Youth can be particularly effective as pioneers ... the UK has been blessed by a number of youth committing themselves to a 'year of service'...

Youth can be particularly effective as pioneers, and the UK has been blessed by a number of youth committing themselves to a 'year of service', or sometimes more than a year, in order to significantly contribute to the processes of growth in certain clusters.

Teaching and expansion phase activities

Teach the Cause. Teach. Teach. Convey the Message. Awaken the souls. Now is the time of laying the foundation. We must gather brick, stone, wood, iron and other building materials. Now is not the time of decoration. We must strive day and night and think and work; what can I say that might become effective? What else can I do that might bring results? What can I write that might bring forth fruits? Nothing else will be useful today. The interests of such a Glorious Cause will not advance without such undivided attention. Whilst we are carrying this load we cannot carry any other load.

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “Star of the West”, vol. 4, no. 15 (12 December 1913), p. 256)

Teaching the Cause lies at the heart of our efforts to advance towards the Golden Age promised by Bahá'u'lláh. Teaching, as we know from the Writings of the Central Figures, the divine guidance of the beloved Guardian, and the infallible messages of the House of Justice, can take place in a variety of settings and with diverse methods and approaches. The community of the Greatest Name in the UK continues to embrace a wide range of these methods – from conversations with friends and neighbours to firesides on topics of interest in the intimacy of the home, from public proclamation activities to personal approaches to those who were hitherto unknown, from discussions at devotional meetings to elevated conversations with parents and siblings of children and junior youth involved in core activities, and so on. All have great value, all are fitting forms of service to Bahá'u'lláh, and all benefit from the pattern of prayerful planning, action and reflection that is the hallmark of a humble posture of learning and the key to sustained growth.

Within this range of teaching activities, particular emphasis has been given by many to learning about sustained and systematic teaching plans, as well as to the work of teaching teams. **Area Teaching Committees** in particular are striving to learn how to accompany growing numbers in this vital field of endeavour. At present, it is estimated that 550 individuals participate in their clusters' expansion phases.

The Area Teaching Committees are themselves being supported by their respective **Regional Bahá'í Councils**. In Scotland, for example, a team formed of Council members and others is working to support the Area Teaching Committees. In England, meanwhile, a series of **four institutional gatherings** took place across the Region in order to share learning and exchange ideas and methods between cluster agencies, Local Assemblies, and individuals, and to coordinate collaboration between them. The practical components of these gatherings have assisted Area Teaching Committee members to understand their role, and the Council will be holding further training events for these Teaching Committees, the next one being in early May.

The significance of **preparing for expansion phases** has been an area of learning for some Area Teaching Committees in the past year, and consultation with teaching teams and the organisation of **neighbourhood reflection meetings** before the period of intense activity commences has proved effective in many settings. In many cases, Area Teaching Committees are focusing on raising the capacity of just a few individuals, and are learning about the **intensity** that is required to translate this accompaniment into a genuine rise in capacity.

Enrolments

What are the fruits of Bahá'í teaching endeavours? Overall, **98 individuals enrolled as Bahá'ís in the last year**. This is broadly similar to recent years, as indicated below. In the lead up to 2010, enrolments peaked at over 140 in a year.

It would be interesting to address questions such as:

- How are we inviting the many members of the community of interest who are involved in Bahá'í activities to join the Faith?
- What are the barriers to increasing enrolments?
- What does the community need to learn about in

ENROLMENTS IN YEAR TO RIDVÁN			
	Adult	Youth	Total
2008	94	10	104
2009	114	14	128
2010	128	13	141
2011	82	13	95
2012	93	7	100
2013	76	22	98

- order to overcome those barriers?
- Are we using what we have learnt about individual and collective teaching in book 6 to greatest effect?

Devotional Meetings



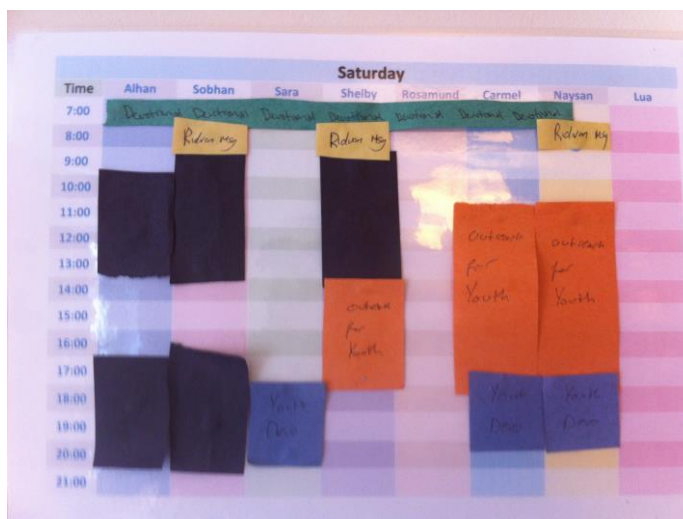
The number of Devotional Meetings has been fluctuating around 300 for the last 3 years. Meanwhile, the number of people trained in book 1 has now reached 3600 in the country, indicating that there is **1 devotional meeting for every 13 trained individuals** (though some friends may be holding devotional meetings jointly). On average, devotional meetings in the UK have almost **6 regular participants**, and approximately **4 in 9 of these are friends of the Faith**. The number of seekers attending is therefore at an all-time high!

	Bk1 trained	DM's	Participants	Comm. Of Interest
Oct-09	n/a	313	1601	639
Apr-10	n/a	363	1793	670
Oct-10	n/a	300	1611	685
Apr-11	n/a	321	1792	694
Oct-11	3189	301	1813	664
Apr-12	3337	287	1591	655
Oct-12	3513	277	1567	662
Apr-13	3605	274	1647	731

Are we using what we have learnt about individual and collective teaching in book 6 to greatest effect?

Neighbourhoods

Intensive work in neighbourhoods is one of the most exciting areas of learning for the community in the UK. It is within these grassroots settings that the strongest signs of community-building can be discerned, where neighbours and local friends, who perhaps did not even know each other before, come together and work actively to take charge of their own social, spiritual and intellectual development. By building unity within the



A DAY'S PLANNING SCHEDULE FOR EXPANSION PHASE IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD

community—not just in terms of love and comradeship, vital as these are, but also in terms of **unity of purpose, vision and action**—concrete steps can be taken towards building the unified world that is the ultimate goal of the spiritual enterprise in which the Bahá'í community is engaged.

... a more profound understanding of how the data is meaningful in planning and reflection...

It is in the growing number of neighbourhoods across the UK where programmes of growth have taken root that the frontiers of learning are being steadily pushed forward. In these settings, the reciprocal importance of building capacity and human resources on the one hand, and reaching out to ever-growing numbers on the other, in a pattern that is punctuated by three-monthly cycles of expansion and consolidation, becomes especially clear.

The following accounts offer some wonderful insights into what can be achieved.

A south-Belfast neighbourhood

A series of vibrant devotionals taking place in the Windsor/Village area of South Belfast are facilitating creative approaches to teaching in the locality. In late 2008, a small group of friends started holding a weekly devotional in their home. This gave rise to a number of study circles over the years, and as the circle of friends grew, so did the group's devotional needs. A second weekly devotional began in late 2011, and soon afterwards some of the friends started a junior youth group through a series of short afternoon sessions visiting neighbours. The Local Spiritual Assembly initiated a third devotional that rotates around homes in the area with the dual purpose of involving Bahá'ís outside the locality, and friends who cannot provide practical support to projects.

Each of our devotionals has a different purpose and atmosphere that allows for a different type of interaction with the other activities in the area. These weekly activities currently consist of two study circles, a junior youth group, and two children's classes. There are around 30 individuals participating on a weekly basis in a geographical area that can be traversed in a 15 minute walk.

We have learned that hosting a devotional is a very simple act of service that can easily become a stimulus for growth. These devotionals have encouraged a handful of our friends to join us in our efforts to transform our community and have enabled us to achieve cohesion between our activities. As a result of this, "a nascent programme for the sustained expansion and consolidation of the Faith can be perceived".

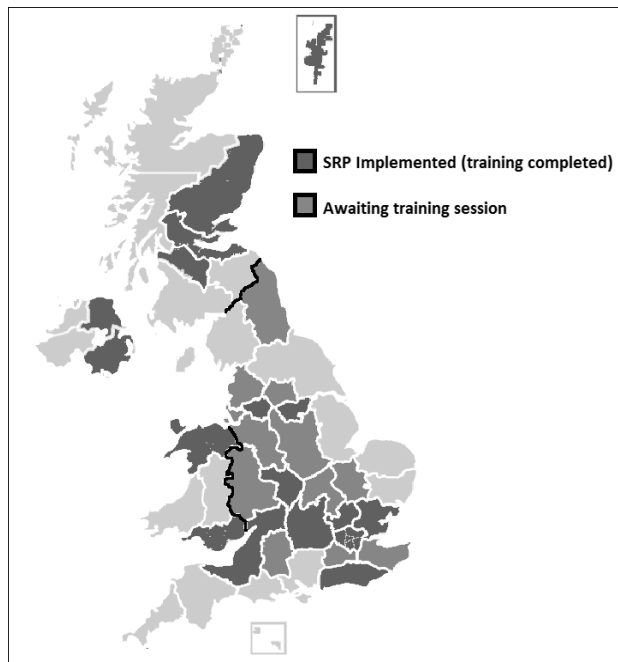
How empowering it is to consider that any teaching team or individual, with resolve and the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, can begin the process of lasting transformation in their local community!

Training in the collection and use of statistics

During the year, the National Statistics Officer has begun systematically training various cluster agencies in the use of the **Statistical Report Programme (SRP)** and the **Statistical Report**

Programme for Training Institutes (SRPI) and combining this with a review of the use of the **Cluster Growth Profile (CGP)**. The ultimate aim is to raise capacity in the use of statistical information by cluster agencies in those clusters that already have a programme of growth, and this map gives an indication of progress to date.

... a more profound understanding of how the data is meaningful in planning and reflection...



Following the training session, most agencies have reported a more purposeful and effective collection of statistics associated with the quarterly CGP, and a more profound understanding of how the data is meaningful in planning and reflection.

D. MISCELLANEOUS

The flow of literature

Significant progress was made during the year to reconfigure literature distribution operations in order to make it more financially viable. We reported last year on the significant losses which **Bahá'í Books UK** had been incurring for a number of years. In order to reduce this loss, the centralized distribution operation at Oakham was closed this year, thus eliminating the staff, operational and property-running costs associated with the premises in Oakham. The National Assembly is deeply grateful to the team of volunteer friends who took charge of this project and continue now to facilitate the flow of literature to individuals and communities.

Schools

The National Spiritual Assembly has been very pleased to see the continuing development of **Summer Schools** as an instrument of growth and in light of the evolving nature of the Bahá'í community. Of note has been that the capacity of new people, including youth, has been raised to serve as facilitators. The **participative style** of courses has also improved. We have also seen an increasing consciousness among the Bahá'ís that schools are places where they can bring their friends, family and those they are working with in the local community to learn more about the Bahá'í Faith and to feel the powerful spirit of Bahá'í community life. It is noted too that schools are inspiring souls to engage ever more deeply with the Five Year Plan and its vision of carrying forward an ever-advancing civilisation. It is the hope of the National Assembly that these changes will continue to evolve over the remaining years of the Plan.

... the capacity of new people, including youth, has been raised to serve as facilitators...

...schools are inspiring souls to engage ever more deeply with the Five Year Plan...

The **coherence** between the theme of the school, the plenaries and the courses on offer is a matter that the Assembly continues to consider. In addition, the Assembly is sensitive to the fact that the high cost of summer schools is a hindrance to attendance for many. The Assembly hopes to find ways of lowering the cost by, for example, self-catering arrangements or smaller schools in more diverse locations. To this end, the National Assembly has asked the Regional Schools Committee in England to work towards **increasing the number of summer schools from the present two schools to three or four in 2014.**

Faroes

During the course of the year in the Faroe Islands, the groups in Toftir and Torshavn began to function more vigorously and the National Assembly was happy to learn that a junior youth group was established in Toftir. Although there are no more than a few handfuls of believers on these islands, when a representative of the National Assembly visited during the course of the year, he witnessed a united and loving community, striving to implement the provisions of the Five-Year Plan.

Faroes ... a united and loving community, striving to implement the provisions of the Five-Year Plan...

Gibraltar

The National Spiritual Assembly was delighted to read a recent report of developments in Gibraltar which has not only passed the first milestone but is making strides towards the second, with three Book 1 study circles, a junior youth group, two regular devotional meetings and a children's class with two grades. This is most promising indeed.

E. CHALLENGES, LEARNING, AND LOOKING AHEAD

While a number of individuals are learning about teaching in neighbourhood settings and walking a path of service hand in hand with others, important issues remain, the answers to which might see the UK community advance forward significantly.

Universal participation remains elusive in most clusters. Attendance at reflection meetings is low in many areas, and sustained intensity during expansion phases is often lacking. In some clusters, there is a lack of movement. So how might the community address these issues? The following questions may be of assistance in considering these matters:

- What are the spiritual forces at our disposal?
- Mindful of what we learn from the institute courses, what are ways by which we can become constant in our individual and collective efforts "to present the essentials of the Faith plainly and unequivocally"?
- What approaches can we take to enable more souls, whether Bahá'í or not, to understand the Plan and become involved in the work?
- Can we learn, in a humble posture of learning, how better to reflect on our actions and enable the cycles of expansion and consolidation to develop?
- How can we identify any stumbling blocks and turn them into stepping stones to progress?

2. SOCIAL ACTION

"Irrespective of its scope and scale, all social action seeks to apply the teachings and principles of the Faith to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly." (Universal House of Justice, Ridván 2010 message).

Most Bahá'í efforts in social action in the UK are fairly simple activities of fixed duration in which problems and challenges in local villages and neighbourhoods are addressed through the application of spiritual principles. At this time in the UK, most social action efforts are undertaken as service projects carried out by participants in the junior youth programme, and include such activities as clean-up projects, teaching children, and charitable initiatives. It is estimated that in the region of 200 such projects happened in the last year. Although the activities may be small, they can have profound effects on the participants, who acquire capacities for service that will remain with them throughout their lives.



3. PARTICIPATION IN THE DISCOURSES OF SOCIETY

In its recent messages, the Universal House of Justice has highlighted learning about participation in the prevalent discourses of society as an area of activity for the Bahá'í community. This process should be characterised, the Supreme Body indicates, by coherence with the conceptual framework which governs the current series of global Plans of the Faith. At the level of the cluster, we are being guided to understand that **participation in the discourses of society will emerge organically** as we are drawn more deeply into the life of society through the processes of expansion and consolidation. However, distinct from the level of the cluster there are opportunities for participation in discourses at the national and regional levels, and the Office of Public Affairs is striving to learn about the approaches, methods and instruments regarding the Bahá'í community's formal participation in the discourses operating in these larger spaces in society.

Learning to participate in the national level discourses of society concerned with the betterment of society

The purpose of our participation in the discourses of society is to contribute to the **reshaping of attitudes and conceptions on fundamental issues pertaining to the advancement of civilization**. The Bahá'í community strives to accomplish this through offering, with sincerity and in a spirit of humility, insights drawn from the Writings of our Faith and the community's growing experience in applying them. As this experience grows and becomes richer, we can anticipate that the knowledge generated by the Bahá'í community on issues relevant to the promotion of the common good will be shared freely by its representatives in an ever-increasing number of social spaces, thus extending the community's learning and experience to more and more people.

The Office recognises that the discourses work at the national level needs to become more **strategic and systematic** so that the Faith can begin to exert a fuller measure of its potential influence on society. At the heart of all efforts in this area is the need to proceed in the same learning mode that characterises our work in the field of expansion and consolidation; this involves the adoption of certain attitudes as well as delineating areas and lines of action to learn about.

Some of the key areas which the Office is striving to learn about include:

- the general approaches, methods and instruments to aid effective participation in the discourses of society
- how to systematise the experience generated
- how to raise the capacity of a growing pool of human resources to participate in the discourses of society and to coordinate their contribution over time
- how to develop distinctive and meaningful content as part of a Bahá'í contribution to a particular discourse
- how to use the Web as a tool for our discourses work
- how to contribute to certain discourses of society through the media

... knowledge generated by the Bahá'í community on issues relevant to the promotion of the common good...

The Office's current efforts are focused on being present in an increasing number of social spaces and becoming familiar with the discourses underway in them. At this stage, the Office sees great potential for meaningful and effective Bahá'í contributions to two national-level discourses, namely the **gender equality discourse** and the discourse on the **role of religion in society**, and is striving to build the capacity of a small group of believers to engage in each of these discourses in the larger social spaces in the United Kingdom. As our capacities and resources increase, we will become more familiar with the conversations going on in a range of social spaces and better able to discern which additional discourses to become involved in.

Gender equality discourse

The contemporary discourse on gender equality is broad and multi-faceted, comprising a number of sub-discourses taking place in a variety of social spaces, each of which can benefit from the input of Bahá'í ideas.

Eliminating violence against women and girls is a sub-discourse that received focused attention from the Office during the past year and efforts were made to be present in spaces in which conversations on this theme are taking place. Suitable social spaces for Bahá'í participation in this sub-discourse were identified in a number of ways, including following consultation with professionals and practitioners engaged in this discourse and also by desk research on relevant civil society organisations and events.

Efforts were also made to generate some content for contribution to the elimination of violence against women sub-discourse and, in this regard, a working paper addressing such themes as the **economic empowerment of women and the role of men and boys in empowering women** was prepared. This document, which is for internal purposes only, will be revised in light of the experience gained in applying the ideas contained therein in conversations with others.



In their efforts to contribute to the gender equality discourse, Bahá'í communities in various parts of the world have found the discussion paper entitled ***Advancing Toward the Equality of Women and Men***, prepared by the Institution for Studies in Global Prosperity, to be of great use. This document invites people to reflect on some of the critical issues that are being raised in the contemporary discourse on gender equality within a framework that is inspired by Bahá'í principles. Individuals active in spaces connected with the discourse on gender equality and who have been found to be receptive to Bahá'í ideas have been invited to participate in gatherings, together with Bahá'ís and held at the National Bahá'í Centre, dedicated to an exploration of themes addressed in the ISGP paper. These have taken the form of **study sessions** of the paper itself as well as **participative seminars** focused on one or more themes taken from the paper. Examples of the latter include a gathering held in July 2012 on the subject of the economic empowerment of women and one in December 2012 entitled “The root causes of violence against women and men”, at which the issue of the inequality between women and men as victims of gender based violence was analysed using the conceptual toolkit presented in the ISGP paper and statements issued by the Bahá'í International Community. Participants in these meetings to date have included representatives of different organisations working for gender equality and the advancement of women as well as academics, students and representatives of charities and faith-based social action groups.

...people to reflect on ...
critical issues ... within a
framework that is inspired
by Bahá'í principles.

Whilst these gatherings and seminars have been valuable, our learning has evolved to a point where, currently, the goals of ongoing study and reflection, have become a priority. This need for the laying of a **foundation for unity of thought and conceptual clarity**, as opposed to an earlier tendency to organise “events” has been a key learning in the gender equality discourse work to date.

This systematic, deep study and research ... should lay an invaluable foundation on which to ... make an effective contribution to the discourse...

Striving to build the capacity of increasing number of individuals across the United Kingdom to make meaningful and effective contributions to the discourse pertaining to the equality of women and men is an object of intense learning for the Office. Experience to date indicates that **regular study and reflection and close accompaniment by those with more experience in this area are key elements in the capacity-building process**. Some ten individuals have been assisting, to

varying degrees, the Office’s efforts to learn about the Bahá’í community’s participation in the gender equality discourse over the past year.

Discourse on the role of religion in society

Further to guidance received from the Bahá’í World Centre in 2011, the role of religion in society was identified as a national-level discourse to which the Bahá’í community will seek to contribute in a meaningful, systematic and coherent way. The Office has been charged by the National Spiritual Assembly to develop **strategies, resources and content** for an effective Bahá’í contribution to this fascinating and important discourse.

The past year has seen an evolution in the Office’s understanding about the nature of our participation in this discourse. It has become clear that the Bahá’í community has been formally participating in certain aspects of this discourse for a number of years as a result of our presence in number of larger spaces. These include religious education and inter faith, which at their heart are concerned with the relevance and role of religion in society.

In striving to learn about the various areas delineated above, the Office has brought together a small group of people with which to collaborate on an ongoing basis in order to **generate insights and develop capacities**. Under the guidance of the Office, this small team, who are expected to draw on the experience and talents of other members of the community, is beginning to think about our participation in the discourse on the role of religion in society. This will include an initial “mapping” of the discourse through research on the various spaces in which the discourse takes place; the identity of the leading actors in the spaces and the nature of their contributions; and the main themes and sub-themes being addressed in the ongoing conversations that together make up the discourse. Further, the team will be charged with undertaking a systematic study of the Bahá’í Sacred Writings, the works of the Guardian, the messages of the Universal House of Justice and the statements commissioned on its behalf, as well as statements of the Bahá’í International Community which address the idea and nature of religion and its role in advancing civilisation, as part of an effort to generate content for the Bahá’í community’s participation in the discourse.

This systematic, deep study and research, the Office hopes, should lay an invaluable foundation on which to learn how and where to best participate and make an effective contribution to the discourse on the role of religion in society. In terms of a possible Bahá'í contribution to the discourse in terms of content and language, an initial start has been made in the form of a **working paper** that seeks to offer original insights, perspectives and ideas to the range of themes in the discourse.

... a notable and welcome increase in inter faith collaboration in recent years...

It is hoped that intimate familiarity with the spaces and the development of meaningful content through this process should aid our participation in the discourse. Through regular and close consultation and reflection between the team and the Office, capacity should develop in both as they walk a path of learning about how to participate effectively in this important discourse of our time.

Representatives of the Office have already begun to contribute to the discourse on the role of religion in society in a number of settings, including at a roundtable discussion at the Channel 4 offices in London held in October 2012 featuring representatives of various faith communities, representatives of the British Humanist Association and the National Secular Society, academics concerned with the study of the role of religion in society, as well as media professionals and prominent atheists, and at a conference on the subject organised by the European Network on Religion and Belief UK Chapter in Leicester in February 2013.

Inter faith

As mentioned above, **the inter faith arena is now being conceived as a space in which the Bahá'í community will seek to contribute to the discourse on the role of religion in society**. Indeed, this has now become one of the main foci of our efforts in inter faith work at the national level; the changing nature of our contribution to the discussions taking place in the Faith Communities Forum of the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom reflects this change in approach.

There has been a notable and welcome increase in inter faith collaboration in recent years in the United Kingdom on matters of social concern, for example the environmental crisis and global poverty. Out of a shared concern with other faith communities about the likely realisation of the Millennium Development Goals by the 2015 deadline, the National Spiritual Assembly was pleased to support a **letter from faith leaders from the G8 group of nations** to the Heads of Government of those countries in connection with the forthcoming G8 meeting in the United Kingdom. The letter was published in the *Financial Times* on 5 April 2013.

The Office is also keen to learn more about the contribution that Bahá'ís can make to **local inter faith activities** in the United Kingdom and to support, where possible, efforts in this area. To this end, the Office is currently reviewing reports submitted by a number of Bahá'í communities that currently contribute to local inter faith initiatives.

Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity

It gives the National Assembly great joy to know that the Institute for Studies in Global Prosperity (ISGP), an agency of the Faith based at the Bahá'í World Centre dedicated to building capacity in individuals, groups and institutions to contribute to prevalent discourses concerned with the betterment of society, has been holding a **sequence of seminars for undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals** in the United Kingdom in recent years. In 2012, the Institute offered both seminars in the UK.

The seminar for undergraduate students titled "participating in the prevalent discourses of society" was held in August 2012 and attended by approximately **80 students**. The purpose of these intensive seminars is to help participating youth explore elements of a conceptual framework for contributing effectively to the advancement of civilisation, encouraging them to maintain a coherent vision of their lives and their involvement in society; to adopt methods that are congruent with their beliefs and provide them with the tools to analyse the culture in which they are immersed and the content of their university courses. In addition it helps students to achieve greater ownership of their education and assist them to acquire the kind of knowledge that will enable them to live fruitful, productive and meaningful lives.

... building capacity in individuals, groups and institutions to contribute to prevalent discourses concerned with the betterment of society...

The **seminar for graduate students** was offered for the first time in the UK this year and was attended by approximately **35 participants**. The purpose of this seminar is to raise the capacity of young adults to participate more effectively in the discourses of society, as a means of contributing to the advancement of civilisation.

Religious education

A two person task force appointed by the Office, drawing on the support of a number of believers with extensive experience in religious education and religious studies, supports parents, religious education teachers and Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) members with their work in schools and local communities. The number of SACREs in England with Bahá'í representatives in England currently stands at 70; in Wales, Bahá'ís are represented on six SACREs. In Northern Ireland, a Bahá'í serves on the Religious Education Advisory Group of the Council for Curriculum Examinations and Assessment.

4. DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

The diplomatic work includes the following areas of activity:

- building sound relations with Government and the institutions of civil society with a view to raising awareness of the Faith and to influencing public policies in a way that contributes to the advancement of civilisation
- defending the Bahá'ís in Iran and in other countries as directed by the Universal House of Justice and the Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office

The Universal House of Justice has been encouraging a number of National Spiritual Assemblies around the world to develop a systematic approach to working with their Governments and organisations of civil society beyond defence concerns so that they can share **Bahá'í-inspired ideas for the betterment of society**. This work will, of course, become more prominent as the Bahá'í community grows in strength and has greater resources at its disposal.

How do we build capacity to enter into a deeper, more meaningful and constructive relationship with Government? How do we build relationships with key individuals in Government? What are

The UK Bahá'í community's relationship with the government reached new heights during the past year...

The Minister for Integration ... quoted passages from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá...

Our relationship with the FCO has become stronger, more open and increasingly reciprocal...

the spaces in which ideas are formed and debated? How do we introduce ideas in a practical way? These are among the key questions being addressed by the Office of Public Affairs as it moves forward in this specialised yet important area of service.

The diplomatic work, including the defence of the Bahá'ís in Iran, is coordinated by a task force of four individuals which has been actively working with an expanding pool of individuals to carry forward its various lines of action. Some nine individuals have been involved in the diplomatic work over the last year. The Office has also initiated a series of **diplomatic training sessions** to open a space for raising the capacity of an expanding number of individuals to be engaged in the diplomatic work; in recent months,

these have been attended by representatives of civil society organisations in the United Kingdom keen to learn about Bahá'í diplomatic work.

Relations with Government

At present, our relationship with Her Majesty's Government has been maintained primarily through our ongoing contact with the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). As a result of a growing interaction with the Government Equalities Office (GEO) in recent years, we were able to establish a relationship with the Home Office. Since September 2012, the GEO is part of the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

How do we build capacity to enter into a deeper, more meaningful and constructive relationship with Government?

The UK Bahá'í community's relationship with the government reached new heights during the past year when, in an unprecedented event, **the DCLG hosted a reception in honour of the UK Bahá'í community to celebrate the Centenary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Britain**. This gathering, initiated by the DCLG following discussions with representatives of the Office stretching back to late 2011,

was held on 28 November 2012, the anniversary of the passing of the Master, at Eland House in London and attended by Government Ministers, Members of Parliament, civil servants, and some 80 believers representing the diversity of the UK community. The reception was addressed by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP and the Minister for Integration, the Rt Hon Don Foster MP, who both spoke with warmth and appreciation for the contribution Bahá'í are making to the betterment of their local communities. The Minister for Integration also quoted passages from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, emphasising their ongoing relevance to the current needs of individuals and communities in the UK and the Government's support in working towards their realisation. A representative of the Bahá'í community also shared some remarks about the significance of the Master's visit to Britain and the current work of the UK Bahá'í community. Subsequently, Mr Foster has accepted an invitation to visit the National Bahá'í Centre and this will take place in June 2013.

During 2012, the Bahá'í community contributed to events organised as part of **A Year of Service** (AYOS), a Government initiative to promote acts of service across the country in collaboration with people of all faiths or none. A representative of the Office served on the Reference Group tasked with promoting the initiative. The launch event was hosted at the National Bahá'í Centre on 28 February 2012 and Bahá'ís took part at the national celebration of AYOS on 27 November.

Our relationship with the FCO has become stronger, more open and increasingly reciprocal in recent years and the focus has broadened beyond the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran to embrace the wider issue of freedom of religion and belief throughout the world. During the past year, **representatives of the Office were able to develop a warm, productive relationship with the Human Rights and Development Directorate (HRDD)** at the FCO, which has begun to turn to the Bahá'í community for ideas in relation to matters pertaining to international religious freedom.

Opportunities for further and deeper engagement with Government in the period ahead appear likely as it grapples with issues of the role of faith in society.

The Office is also mindful of the need to develop our engagement with the **devolved governmental structures in Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales**, through appropriate interaction and representation.

Relations with civil society organisations

The Office of Public Affairs seeks to enter into meaningful relationships with like-minded, non-partisan organisations committed to working for the advancement of civilisation. During the past year, the Office has intensified its working relationship with a number of organisations – particularly faith-based groups and think tanks – concerned with such issues as **faith, cohesion and community development; inter religious education and understanding; and religious freedom**. These include Christian Solidarity Worldwide, the Coexistence Trust, Forward Thinking, Open Doors, Oxford House, and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation. During the past year, representatives of some of these groups have attended meetings at the National Bahá'í Centre to share learning about effective approaches to human rights advocacy and capacity-building work.

Influencing public policy

It is becoming clear that our engagement in the public policy arena at the national level will most likely naturally flow out of our participation in the discourses of society as we seek to **develop practical solutions to the pressing social challenges** identified through our involvement in these discourses. At the national level, the Office has sought for some time now to contribute where it can to the formulation and implementation of policies that address certain social concerns, such as **gender equality, human rights and social justice**, and we have learned something about the dynamics of the public policy process. However, our successes to date have been extremely modest and we have a great deal to do and to learn in this area.

... the standard of rigour required when sharing profound concepts derived from the Bahá'í Writings...

During the past year, the Office pursued activity in a variety of social spaces associated with the discourses on development, gender equality, and religious freedom with a view to contributing to Government policy in these areas. As a result, it has begun to more keenly appreciate the complexities inherent in efforts to offer thoughts inspired by the Faith's teachings to policy discussions, particularly the standard of rigour required when sharing profound concepts derived from the Bahá'í Writings in such spaces.

A very significant development in the history of Bahá'í engagement in the public policy process in the United Kingdom took place in March 2012 with the **submission of a paper, approved at the Bahá'í World Centre, concerning the proposed creation of an Office of Religious Freedom within the FCO**. The document generated a warm response from Alistair Burt MP, Minister for the Middle East and North Africa.

DEFENCE WORK

The situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran

As with the broader human rights situation in Iran, the plight of Bahá'ís in the country remains dire. The Office continues to dedicate considerable effort to **learning about effective approaches, methods and instruments** in highlighting the injustices faced by Bahá'ís in the Cradle of the Faith. Given the long-standing and intractable nature of the persecution, a continuing challenge has been learning how to **accompany receptive contacts** in Government, Parliament, civil society organisations, the mass media and in public life to fully appreciate the nature and scale of the

persecution, the ultimate aim of the Iranian regime, and the manner of action that may be most effective in defending the rights of Iran's Bahá'ís and to holding the Iranian authorities accountable for their actions.

...UK officials specifically raised the issue of Iran's treatment of its Bahá'í community...

This coming year will see the **fifth anniversary of the incarceration of the former members of the Yárán**. Together with sister Bahá'í communities in other countries, the Office will be embarking upon a

coordinated campaign to mark this anniversary and highlight the ongoing persecution endured by countless innocent Bahá'ís and other citizens of Iran.

Contact with Her Majesty's Government

The Office has continued to build on its existing strong relationship with the FCO regarding the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran and broader issues of international religious freedom at the level of principle. This relationship has been nurtured through regular formal and informal communication and meetings on a range of issues related to the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. This may have contributed to continued robust UK support for international scrutiny of the human rights situation in Iran, including its treatment of the Bahá'í community. For the first time in recent years UK officials specifically raised the issue of Iran's treatment of its Bahá'í community during an interactive dialogue with the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran at the UN General Assembly Third Committee in New York in October 2012 and again at the UN Human Rights Council in March 2013.



The Office has built on efforts in previous years to augment its relationship with the FCO through informal contact. The last 12 months have seen participation by a senior FCO official in one of a series of regular **diplomatic training sessions** that are facilitated by the Office.



Relations with Parliament

The **All Party Parliamentary Friends of the Bahá'ís Group** (APPG) has remained a key tool in raising the situation of Bahá'ís in Iran in Parliament. Its value in complementing the Office's relationship with the FCO and amplifying efforts to highlight concerns for the plight of Bahá'ís in Iran has also become increasingly clear. For example, in October 2012 members of the APPG initiated and spoke in a **Westminster Hall Debate** on the human rights situation in Iran. This debate allowed MPs from across the political spectrum to highlight the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran and put questions to the relevant Government Minister about what actions could be taken to defend Bahá'ís and other persecuted communities in that country. Requests from Parliamentarians in this debate may have led to action by UK officials at the United Nations last November as discussed above. This interesting triangulation of Parliamentary and Government activity with the human rights work of United Nations agencies has been a useful learning experience for the Office.



An APPG ensures a degree of access to Parliament and a measure of establishment credibility. It also provides a network of support and can be used as collective voice. The Office has continued to systematically reach out to and build relationships with Parliamentarians of both Houses. The APPG has continued to grow in membership over the past year with two new officers expanding the leadership of the Group and contributing to advancing the achievement of last year's goal of establishing a more dynamic and proactive leadership. The membership of the APPG continued to grow during the past year and stands at **60 members** at the time of writing of whom nine sit in the House of Lords. Although systematically expanding membership of the Group will remain a goal for the coming year, more important will be to learn how to **consolidate, deepen and further nurture**

relationships with existing members and other supporters in Parliament. Developing a strategic and focused outreach to Parliamentarians of both Houses will hopefully assist with this process.

In identifying receptivity amongst Parliamentarians, experience has shown that a **strong link to local Bahá'í constituents** can be key in cultivating an interest in our concerns. During the past year, the Office facilitated a number of meetings between Members of Parliament and their local Bahá'í constituents.

Supportive APPG members have persisted with the regular use of **a range of Parliamentary mechanisms** that seek information or request action from Government with regards to the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran. The Office will continue to learn more about how to best utilise these range of mechanisms and build on its experience to date on the nature of accompaniment Parliamentarians need in taking these actions.

The Office has been a vigorous contributor of ideas and recommendations to this new APPG...

The APPG has also hosted several **high profile events** during the past year. On 12 December 2012, Nic Dakin MP chaired a seminar on the topic of **“Access to Education in Iran”**. It was of particular significance that the keynote speaker at the meeting was the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran. The seminar was attended by a capacity audience, including FCO officials, Parliamentarians and human rights activists.

A significant development in Parliament last year was the creation of an **All Party Parliamentary Group on International Religious Freedom**. The Office has been a vigorous contributor of ideas and recommendations to this new APPG from the very outset of its existence and has contributed oral and written evidence to the Group's inaugural report on **“Article 18 – an orphaned right”**. Learning how to collaborate further with this dynamic APPG will be an important area of work in the coming year.

Enlisting the support of civil society organisations and prominent individuals

This year has seen enthusiastic and principled support in defence of the Bahá'ís in Iran from a similar range of civil society organisations as previous years, including Christian Solidarity Worldwide, Open Doors, the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the Law Society, United4Iran, the Bar Human Rights Committee, and Small Media. However, the Office is eager to learn more about how to collaborate further with civil society organisations on issues of common interest and the criteria to be applied in choosing which organisations to establish relationships with.

The last year has seen the Office experiment with engaging contacts from civil society organisations **in study and training sessions on issues related to the Bahá'í approach to diplomatic work**, including the defence of the Bahá'ís in Iran. These initial experiences will continue to be reflected on for their potential in establishing meaningful relationships rooted in common action.

Experience has shown that **personal friendship** has been a key element in forging sound working relationships with these bodies. Reciprocity is very important in this area of work – there is a need

to demonstrate that we are genuinely concerned with the rights of all and to lend our support, whether moral or practical, in defence of other human rights violations where we can.

Opportunities for the defence work in **interfaith activities** at the national and regional levels continues to be an area of learning. Engaging the support of prominent figures in the Muslim community, in particular, remains a major challenge. The need to identify, access and engage a growing pool of prominent individuals to assist with the defence work has not been easy and will require further action to generate meaningful learning.

Media-related defence work

Media coverage of the situation of the Bahá'ís, while not as extensive as in the previous year, continued apace and with some new successes.

In late 2012, the Office received guidance from the Bahá'í International Community to focus media attention on the **decades of persecution against the Bahá'ís of Semnan, Iran**. A longstanding journalist for *The Times*, Michael Binyon, who first wrote about the Faith in July 2011, was once again able to write about the plight of Iran's Bahá'ís. His article appeared in *The Times* on 29 December 2012; its accuracy, fullness and fairness make it a signature piece of journalism on the persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran.

Saeed Kamali Dehghan, an Iranian-born journalist at *The Guardian*, wrote a piece about the denial of higher education to the Bahá'ís in Iran in that newspaper on 27 February 2013. This journalist has on several occasions made passing reference to the situation of the Bahá'ís in Iran in his reporting, and usually without prompting by the Office. His article on the denial of higher education to Bahá'ís was the first time he had been able to dedicate an entire piece to the persecution of the believers in Iran.

During the past year, the Office continued to give thought as to how to balance responding to the calls of the Universal House of Justice in trying to create as much media coverage as possible regarding the Bahá'ís in Iran while at the same time remaining sensitive to not over-taxing the sympathy of our contacts in a crowded news landscape.

Capacity building and further areas of learning

Central to the long term work of the Office will be learning how to build capacity in a growing pool of individuals to contribute to the defence work. **The identification of suitable individuals to engage in this specialised area of service**, the nature of the **accompaniment** needed, and the most effective way to **coordinate** the efforts of an increasing number of individuals in this area will continue to be the subject of learning by the Office. The past year saw a growing number of individuals offering periods of service to the Office. This initial experience is demonstrating that where enthusiastic individuals from a range of

... learning how to build capacity in a growing pool of individuals to contribute to the defence work...

...coherence with the conceptual framework which governs the current series of global Plans of the Faith.

backgrounds commit a set period of time, through close accompaniment rooted in action, capacity to make a meaningful contribution to the defence work can be very effectively and quickly raised.

- How can we build meaningful relationships that manifest themselves in substantive action?
- What does receptivity look like in this area of work and how can we gauge it?
- What is the nature of the accompaniment needed to generate effective action?
- In the spirit of building relationships rooted in action, how can we respond to the growing need to be seen to also speak out for other communities denied basic human rights in Iran?
- How can we ensure coherence between the defence work and the wider work in which the Bahá'í community is engaged?
- We will need to learn about these and other matters in the months ahead.

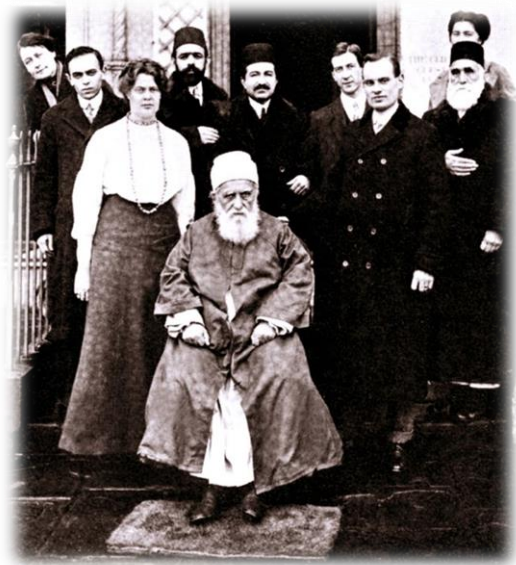
Striving to build the capacity of increasing number of individuals across the United Kingdom to make meaningful and effective contributions to the discourse pertaining to the equality of women and men is an object of intense learning for the Office. Experience to date indicates that **regular study and reflection and close accompaniment by those with more experience in this area are key elements in the capacity-building process**. Some ten individuals have been assisting, to varying degrees, the Office's efforts to learn about the Bahá'í community's participation in the gender equality discourse over the past year.

5. OTHER AREA OF ENDEAVOUR AND HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE YEAR

A. CENTENARY CELEBRATIONS FOR THE VISIT OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

Devotionals, teaching activities, conversations, children's classes, gatherings, study circles, junior youth activities, schools, firesides and indeed thousands of acts of service over the last year were profoundly enriched and inspired by the remembrance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's second visit to these shores one hundred years ago, from 13 December 1912 to 21 January 1913. It has left a legacy that will remain with all who felt His spirit during these days.

The National Spiritual Assembly set out early in the year to organise a national festival to be held during the Centenary period commemorating 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit, but despite great efforts, it did not come to fruition. This proved to be a blessing in disguise! Instead of one national event, seven gatherings were held through the United Kingdom over the weekend of 5-6 January 2013. In announcing the gatherings, the Assembly wrote:



... the vision of the National Assembly is that each gathering will be an occasion to gain inspiration from the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá during the centenary period of His second visit to Britain. Each gathering will also be a time for all who attend to see, even more clearly, what must be done individually and collectively at this time in the field of expansion and consolidation, and will particularly focus on the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme and the ways in which each and every believer can support its spread in diverse settings across the country.

These gatherings, which were truly a great success, were **attended by over 1,400 believers**, including many from the community of interest. The focus on junior youth also had a significant impact, which is discussed later in this report.

B. UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Members of the National Spiritual Assembly have had the privilege and joy of participating in the election of the Universal House of Justice and the International Convention which was held in Haifa from 29 April to 2 May 2013. Undoubtedly, the National Convention 2013 will be instilled with the spirit of International Convention, which marks the 50th year since the inception of the Supreme Body in 1963.



The National Assembly feels the constant love and guidance of the Supreme Body expressed in so many ways, not the least of which is the flow of guidance that is inspiring, visionary and abundant.

The National Assembly receives many letters from the House of Justice on a variety of subjects, a significant number of which are in response to questions it raises or guidance it seeks. The following are some of the principle communications shared with the community:

- 21 Apr 2012 Ridván 2012 Message
- 1 Jun 2012 Response to National Convention message
- 3 Jul 2012 Contribution to the Temple fund on behalf of friends in Iran
- 6 Nov 2012 Retirement of Dr Farzam Arbab and Mr Kiser Barnes from membership
- 2 Jan 2013 Persian translation of the document “The Prosperity of Humankind”, together with a cover letter in Persian and English dated 2 January 2013 from the Universal House of Justice to the believers in Iran.
- 8 Feb 2013 95 Youth conferences
- 2 Mar 2013 To the Bahá’ís in Iran – non-involvement in partisan politics
- 13 Mar 2013 Enclosing three letters sent to the friends in Iran between March and May 2012 in Persian and English on such subjects as fasting and Naw-Rúz, as well as the severe ordeals and injustices faced by the dear friends in Iran.
- 20 Mar 2013 To the Bahá’ís in Iran – Naw Ruz message

The National Assembly was sad to learn of the passing of Mr. Mas'ud Khamsi, a former member of the International Teaching Centre who had a long record of distinguished service to the Cause. He will be especially remembered in prayers at the National Convention this year.

C. THE INSTITUTION OF THE COUNSELLORS

The loving and collaborative relationship in so many aspect of its work, which the National Spiritual Assembly is blest to experience with the Continental Board of Counsellors and, in particular, Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, is indispensable for the work of the Cause at the national level. The National Assembly meets regularly with the Counsellor, but the collaboration is constant, even between meetings. Of course the community will be only too aware of the essential and tireless role which the Counsellors and their Auxiliaries, as well as the assistants, play in the promotion and protection of the Faith in every corner of the United Kingdom. The National Assembly wishes to record its deep appreciation to each and every one of them on behalf of the entire community.

The loving and collaborative relationship ... with the Continental Board of Counsellors and, in particular, Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, is indispensable. ... the collaboration is constant

D. NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY

The Ridván 2010 message alludes to the development of institutional capacity during the current Five Year Plan.

“... the development we are sure to witness in Local Spiritual Assemblies over the next several years is made possible by the growing strength of National Spiritual Assemblies, whose ability to think and act strategically has risen perceptibly, especially as they have learned to analyse the community-building process at the grassroots with increasing acuity and effectiveness and to inject into it, as needed, assistance, resources, encouragement, and loving guidance. In countries where conditions demand it, they have devolved a number of other responsibilities in this respect to Regional Councils, decentralizing certain administrative functions, enhancing institutional capacity in areas under their jurisdiction, and fostering more sophisticated sets of interactions...”

The National Spiritual Assembly has been consciously striving to “think and act strategically in all of its endeavours”. In this respect, it has given particular attention to the conditions required for effective consultation laid down by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and this in turn has facilitated a **common vision emerging as to what the most important areas of work are to give attention to in order that the objectives of the Five Year Plan are achieved**. It is also endeavouring to learn how to effectively **draw on statistics in its consultations** to “analyse the community-building process at grassroots with... acuity and effectiveness”.

Another area of ongoing learning for the National Assembly is its own role in relation to **accompanying Regional Councils and the Training Institute Board for the United Kingdom** and the manner in which it can best support these vital agencies. Considerable time has been given by the Assembly to this subject, and the National Assembly still feels it is in the very early stages of learning how best to do this in a meaningful manner. Nevertheless, it is striving to help build their capacity, and the officers of the National Assembly in particular have endeavoured to accompany the equivalent officers of the various institutions. In addition, National Assembly members have been joining discussions on specific themes with those institutions and where possible have attended their regular consultations too.

E. GUARDIAN’S RESTING PLACE

The National Spiritual Assembly has for some time now been concerned that the Resting Place of the beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, as well as the section of the surrounding cemetery that is owned by the Faith, are in need of some special attention. Although cared for by many friends with the utmost love and dedication, the passage of time has resulted in weathering and some damage to the monument and its surroundings. In light of this, a report was submitted to the Universal House of Justice for its consideration.

The House of Justice responded that the report “clearly indicates the need for serious attention to be paid to the site’s maintenance and renovation, if the process of deterioration is to be arrested”. Further guidance was given as to how to assess whether repair or replacement of a feature was necessary. In all cases where a feature is to be changed, a **high-quality replacement is to be used which resembles the original as closely as possible**. On the basis of the guidance received, steps

were taken to assess what is required. An additional report was commissioned and in light of this further guidance has been sought from the House of Justice. The process of tendering for the work by suitable contractors has commenced.

A budget has yet to be confirmed in relation to these works, but current estimates indicate that it will cost in the region of £150,000. A report on the funds raised to date for this project is attached in the financial section of the Annual Report.

Another major undertaking completed during the year by volunteers was the documentation of the many hundreds of plots in the Bahá'í section of the cemetery.



F. HUQÚQU'LLÁH

As a practice, the National Spiritual Assembly meets from time to time with the Board of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh for Ireland and the United Kingdom, and such a meeting took place in June 2012. It provided the National Assembly with a special opportunity to grow closer to this mighty Law of

... a special opportunity to grow closer to this mighty Law of Bahá'u'lláh...

Bahá'u'lláh and to deepen its understanding of its significance. One of the purposes of the consultation was for the Assembly to explore with the Board how it can support its efforts to promote the Law throughout the United Kingdom. It reflected on its own role in doing this, and how it might facilitate other institutions, such as the Regional Bahá'í Councils and local Spiritual Assemblies in playing their part in promoting a deeper

understanding of the significance and importance of this law.

G. COMMUNICATIONS: UKBAHÁ'Í MAGAZINE AND THE ADMINISTRATIVE WEBSITE

UKBahá'í magazine editorial team produced some excellent editions during this Centenary year. Owing to the cost of producing and distributing the magazine, the National Assembly has **reduced it from a bi-monthly to a quarterly publication**. It is the hope of the National Assembly that an increasing number of believers will rely on the on-line edition, which is available from the new administrative website at admin.bahai.org.uk. Although the numbers of printed and distributed copies have reduced by a small number, the reduction has not been as much as the National Assembly would have expected.

The password-protected administrative website is now a rich resource of Bahá'í materials including messages of the Universal House of Justice, the email NEWS items from the National Spiritual

Assembly and its agencies, guidance notes for local Spiritual Assemblies and more. To date **442 persons have registered** for access to this password protected website.

H. THE INDIVIDUAL, THE INSTITUTIONS AND THE COMMUNITY – EVOLVING RELATIONSHIPS

The National Assembly has been reflecting on its effort to explore the evolving relationship between “the individual, the institutions and the community—the three protagonists in the Divine Plan”. In the 28 December 2010 message of the House of Justice we are told that these relationships “are being shaped under the direct influence of His Revelation, and a new conception of each, appropriate for a humanity that has come of age, is emerging.” They “are undergoing a profound transformation” explaining that “at a fundamental level these relationships are characterized by cooperation and reciprocity, manifestations of the interconnectedness that governs the universe.” The House of Justice continue:

So it is that the individual, with no regard for “personal benefits and selfish advantages,” comes to see him- or herself as “one of the servants of God, the All-Possessing,” whose only desire is to carry out His laws. So it is that the friends come to recognize that “wealth of sentiment, abundance of good-will and effort” are of little avail when their flow is not directed along proper channels, that “the unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice,” and that “the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.” And so it is that all come to discern with ease those areas of activity in which the individual can best exercise initiative and those which fall to the institutions alone. “With heart and soul”, the friends follow the directives of their institutions, so that, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “things may be properly ordered and well arranged”. This, of course, is not a blind obedience; it is an obedience that marks the emergence of a mature human race which grasps the implications of a system as far-reaching as Bahá’u’lláh’s new World Order.

Arising from its reflections on such passages, **the Assembly is exploring many questions** including: What might those “areas of activity” be where individual initiative is best exercised and those which fall under the institutions? Can individuals promote a private initiative, whether in the arena of business, social action, the arts or other fields, within the Bahá’í community, and if so, how would one go about it? Reflecting on these and other questions and striving to apply the guidance to hand in answering them will surely continue to be a source of learning for the National Assembly, as well as for individual Bahá’ís and the community as a whole, in years to come.

I. CHANGES IN UNIT CONVENTION BOUNDARIES

During the year some necessary changes were made to Unit Convention boundaries in various regions of the United Kingdom, the purpose of which was to ensure proper representation by adjusting the boundaries so that the number of voting adults in each Unit is within a reasonable range, such that there is neither too few nor too many within a single Unit. The Unit Convention held in December last was the first occasion where these new boundaries were applicable.

J. PASTORAL CARE AND CHAPLAINCY

Pastoral Care continues to be an area of learning and some considerable experience has now been gathered with teams of capable believers rendering great service in the two main arenas of pastoral care and safeguarding children and youth.

There are three agencies involved: the **Office for Safeguarding Children** deals with the prevention of abuse against children and has a responsibility for monitoring individuals with specific convictions within the Bahá'í community and, along with the individuals' appointed safeguarding workers, overseeing their safeguarding agreements; the **Pastoral Care Committee** (PCC) deals mainly with mental health and marital issues; and the **Special Care Committee** (SCC) deals with situations involving risk of harm and/or multiple problems.

Referrals to the pastoral committees are made only via the National Spiritual Assembly. The SCC as of November last year had a case load of 18 people who were coping with 28 different problems: the PCC had a case load of 35 people and a range of 36 problems.

Another area of parallel work is chaplaincy. We currently have **11 chaplains** active in the NHS, both in acute and hospice services, and one in the prison service. There is a new cohort of eight applicants due to be trained in June.

The Multi Faith Group for Healthcare Chaplaincy, of which the National Spiritual Assembly is a founder member, continues to support the faith communities in developing their chaplaincy services. It is having to respond to the changes that are coming about in the NHS. It is also striving to improve relations between the various chaplaincy bodies and organisations, which do not always see eye to eye.

K. NATIONAL LIBRARY

The National Spiritual Assembly has seen fit to re-establish the National Library in the National Hazírat'ul-Quds. Some years ago, the library was transferred to the **Afnan Library** and, with the agreement of the Afnan Library Trustees, this will now be transferred back to the National Spiritual Assembly. The library was recently greatly enhanced when Bahá'í Books UK closed their premises in Oakham. Over the years, the previous Bahá'í Publishing Trust and subsequently Bahá'í Books UK built up an **impressive library of literature and this will now form part of the National Library**. It will take some time for this to be set up as, among other things, appropriate shelving will need to be built in the National Hazíratu'l-Quds to house the library, but in due course it will be open to the community for use.

The National Spiritual Assembly has seen fit to re-establish the National Library in the National Hazírat'ul-Quds.

6. FINANCIAL REPORT

There are a number of Bahá'í funds operating in the United Kingdom, of which the main fund is the

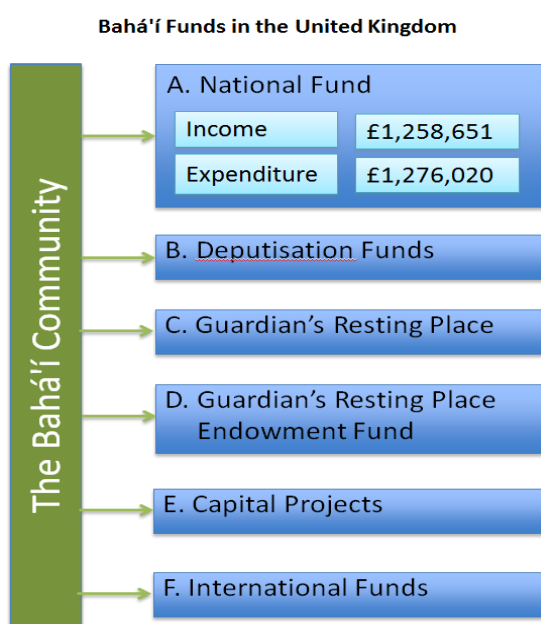


FIGURE 1: OVERVIEW OF VARIOUS BAHÁ'Í FUNDS

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

However, there are also other funds to which the community can directly contribute. Deputisation Funds (such as for the Training Institute or for China) are earmarked funds (specifically designated funds for a particular purpose). Another such fund is for the upkeep of the Guardian's Resting Place. From time to time the National Assembly asks the friends to directly contribute to this fund. In 2011 the National Assembly set up a separate endowment fund, which will provide

the necessary funding for the upkeep of the Resting Place in the future. However, for now, we are blessed to have the opportunity to both pay for the current upkeep as well as contributing to future maintenance in the years and decades to come. The Capital Projects Fund is for any capital expenditure in the UK. For example, this fund was used to support the renovation of the Edinburgh Bahá'í Centre.

The National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to present its financial report for the year ended 31 January 2013.

A. NATIONAL FUND

The financial situation at 31 January 2013 shows the National Fund with a deficit of £94,167, including £76,798 carried forward from 2011/2012.

Income for the year to 31 January 2013 was £1,258,651 of which the friends in the UK directly contributed £749,726.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of The United Kingdom FINANCIAL YEAR 2012/13				
INCOME	Actuals 2010/11	Actuals 2011/12	Actuals 2012/13	%
England Contributions	574,436	548,622	658,146	52%
N. Ireland Contributions	32,036	35,056	26,958	2%
Scotland Contributions	35,350	35,209	42,410	3%
Wales Contributions	20,293	20,382	22,212	2%
Legacies	96,910	921	7,000	1%
Gift Aid	380,624	383,043	381,232	30%
Other Income	47,883	73,245	45,254	4%
Schools Contributions	25,993	23,584	6,901	1%
Rental, Interest	119,051	109,372	68,538	5%
TOTAL INCOME	£1,332,576	£1,229,435	£1,258,651	100%

Figure 2: Income for the Year 2012-13 Total: £1,258,651

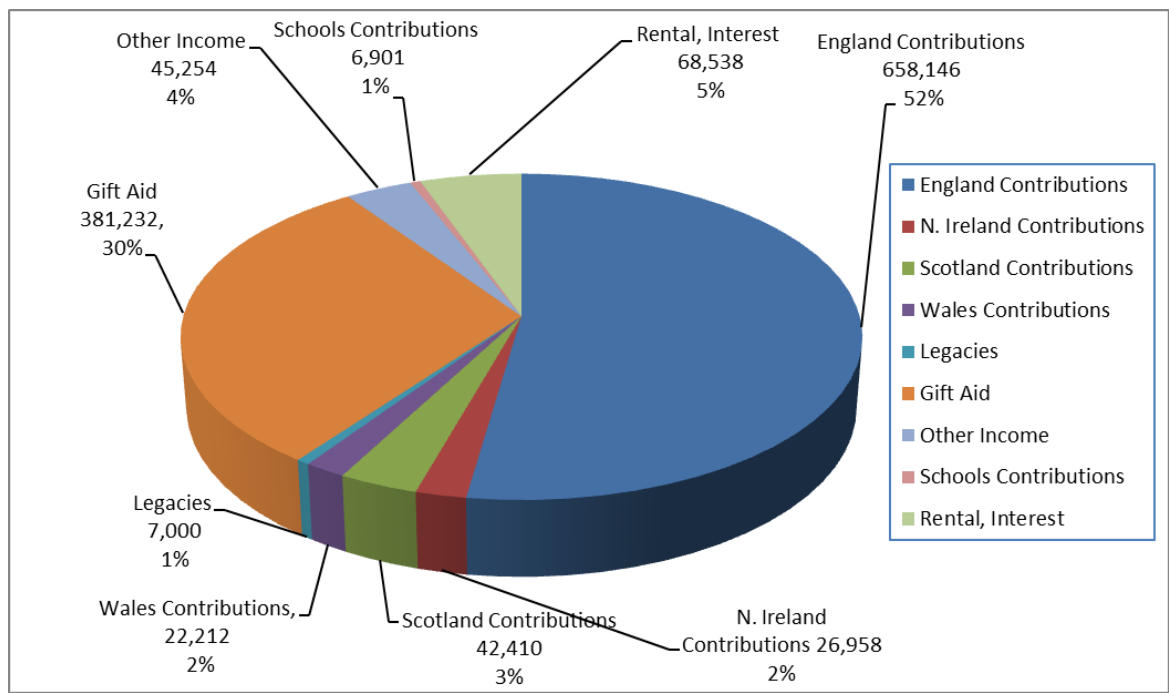


Figure 3: Income Graph for the year ended 31 Jan 2013

Expenditure for the year to 31 January 2013 was £1,276,020. The expenditure is broken into the following broad categories. Please note the 2013 budget is also included for comparison purposes.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of The United Kingdom FINANCIAL YEAR 2012/2013				
EXEPNDITURE	Actuals 2010/11	Actuals 2011/12	Actuals 2012/13	Budget 2013 For 11 months*
Growth	169,858	243,653	204,334	258,414
IT	26,432	18,098	31,027	18,517
Secretariat, office & building Services	288,133	271,393	299,782	281,144
External Affairs	120,279	153,609	142,686	140,508
Legal, Insurance, charges	37,771	35,888	27,837	29,513
Finance Office	78,716	85,587	83,468	77,744
Contributions to International Funds	373,910	347,085	401,202	336,293
Properties Maintenance	135,919	117,409	85,684	97,003
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	£1,231,018	£1,272,722	£1,276,020	£1,239,136

Figure 4: Expenditure for the year 2012-13 Total: £1,276,020

* please see later in the report for explanation of 11 months.

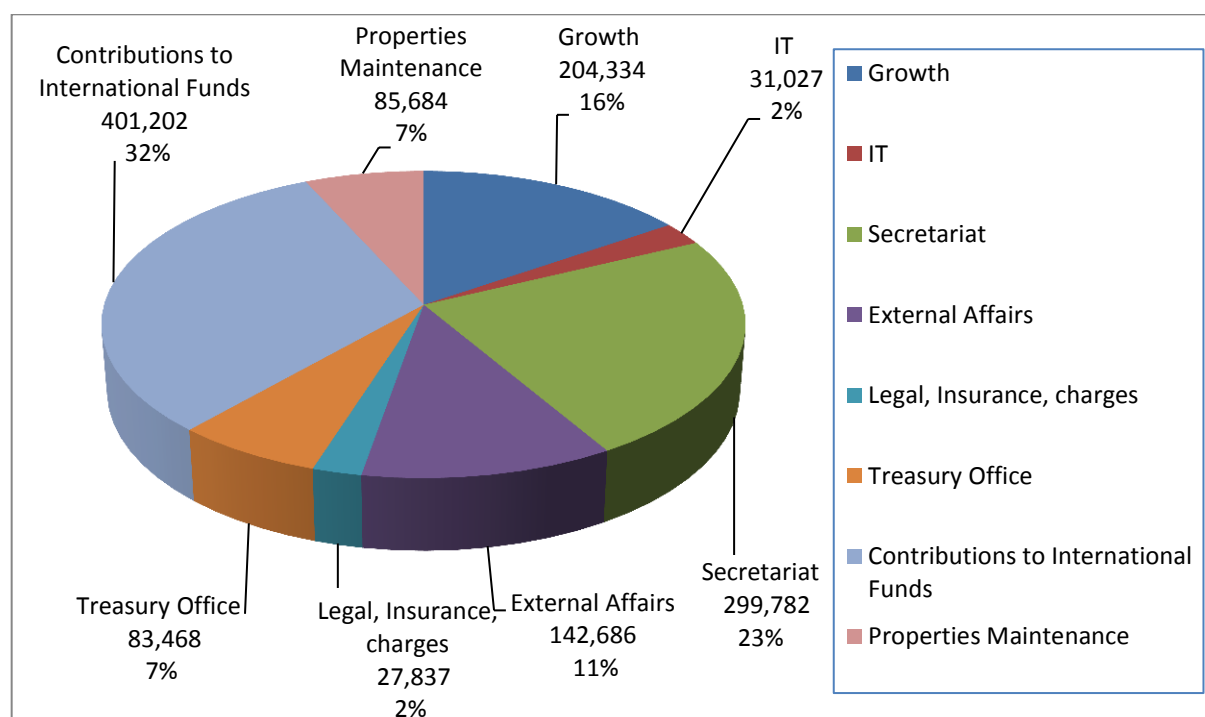


Figure 5: Expenditure Graph for the year 2012-13

National Fund - Summary of the year

The primary source of the National Assembly's income is the donations of the believers in the United Kingdom. For 2012-13 this represented 60% (£749,726) of the total income. A further 30% (£381,232) of income was from the tax refund received on all donations to or through the National Assembly under the Gift Aid scheme. The following shows the amount donated in each region and the average amount per person donated:

Total contributions	2010/2011		2011/2012		2012/2013	
	Actual £	Average Per Person £	Actual £	Average Per Person £	Actual £	Average Per Person £
England	574,436	108	548,622	135	658,146	136
Northern Ireland	32,036	102	35,056	181	26,958	107
Scotland	35,350	52	35,209	94	42,410	89
Wales	20,293	52	20,382	87	22,212	83

Figure 6: Total amount donated to the National Fund from each region of the United Kingdom, including contributions directly to the Bahá'í Councils and the average donation per adult, youth and child in the community (based on community database).

There has been a significant increase in the number and value of standing orders, and a slight increase in the number of those who are paying using the Gift Aid system. The number of contributors using Gift Aid is still lower than in 2011:

Number of contributors	2011	2012	2013
Individuals contributing by standing orders	591	584	648
Assemblies and Groups contributing by standing orders	43	49	52
Gift Aid Contributors to all Funds & Huqúqu'lláh	837	699	707

Figure 7: Donations to the National Fund by standing order and the number of Gift Aid contributors to all funds, as well as Huqúqu'lláh, in the months of January 2011, 2012 and 2013

An estimated 29% (2011-12, 30%) of the friends contribute to the National Fund. As last year, this is an approximation including those who contribute to the National Fund through their local funds. Also, the method of calculation used is based on individuals contributing, and not households.

This year's total expenditure of £1,276,020 was only £3,298 more than in 2011/12 (about a 0.3% increase), which is due to the National Assembly's ongoing efforts to reduce expenditure. There was also a decrease in Growth related expenditure (by £39,319), because the expenses of the Training Institute Board and the Baha'i Councils were lower, thus helping to reduce the deficit to £17,369 for 2012-13.

Apart from Growth, contributions to the International funds, and properties there was an increase of £20,224 in the functioning of the national administration; also £85,684 was spent for properties,

a saving of £31,725 compared to the previous year. During this year we lost our main tenant at Bridge House, which has resulted in a reduction of about £67,000 from our property income and an increase in our property expenditure of about £10,000 due to service charges, which has resulted in a total of about £77,000 from our spending power. On a positive note, however, we have managed to keep the business rates for the empty units at zero.

In 2012/13, for every £1 (excluding Gift Aid and other incomes) donated to the National Fund by the believers in the UK, 54 pence was donated by the National Assembly to international funds, including, among others, the European and Chile Temple funds, as well as the International fund and the World Centre Endowment fund. The National Spiritual Assembly is very pleased to be able to make such contributions on behalf of the friends in the UK and will continue to do its utmost to sustain this level, which is a source of blessing and confirmation to the work of the Cause in the United Kingdom.

B. DEPUTISATION FUNDS

At the end of January 2013, there were four deputisation funds in the UK.

Deputisation Funds	Deputisation UKTIB	Deputisation General	Deputisation Faroes	Deputisation China
	£	£	£	£
Opening balance		35,240	3,600	9,107
Contribution	23,214	15,238	1,510	5,620
Total	23,214	50,478	5,110	14,727
Expenditure	-13,304	-11,214	-	-666
Balance 31 Jan 2013	9,910	39,265	5,110	14,061

Figure 8: Deputisation funds during the year and balances as at 31 January 2013

C. GUARDIAN'S RESTING PLACE FUND

The annual expenditure for 2012-13 for the maintenance of the Guardian's Resting Place was estimated to be £66,000. The final income and expenditure has been:

Guardian 's Resting Place	Annual Expenditure
	£
Opening balance	25,446
Contributions	30,306
Expenditure	-37,207
balance 31 Jan 2013	18,545

Figure 9: Guardian's Resting Place income and expenditure during 2012-13

On 13 December 2012, the National Assembly shared with the friends some plans “for serious attention to be paid to the site’s maintenance and renovation”. This extensive plan includes replacement of the entrance gate to the resting place, the red brick wall which adjoins the gate and surrounds the outer courtyard of the resting place, the renovation of the marble monument, the balustrade surrounding the monument, and, in particular, the vases situated on its four corners, as well as the gate as one enters the Bahá’í section of the cemetery with its beautiful buttresses to be cleaned and restored, and a new railing to be erected running to each side of the gate and along the edge of that side of the cemetery.

There will be considerable expense involved in all of this work. At the present time an accurate budget is not available, but it is estimated to be well over £100,000 on top of the usual annual expenditure. This projection will be carried forward to the 2013 financial expenditure and it is hoped that the friends will contribute to this most important plan of the National Assembly in due course.

D. GUARDIAN’S RESTING PLACE ENDOWMENT FUND

In a letter of May 2008 the Universal House of Justice suggested to the National Assembly that “in view of the need to establish a more stable means of income in future for the upkeep of this most important holy place” the National Assembly should “consider the feasibility of establishing an endowment fund for this purpose.” In response to this guidance, the National Spiritual Assembly established an endowment fund for the maintenance of the resting place of the beloved Guardian.

The National Assembly’s intention is that the fund will be built up over time, eventually providing a capital sum, the income from which will provide for the upkeep of this holy place. For 2012/13, the National Spiritual Assembly had set a goal for contributions of £130,000, an addition to the £66,000 required for the continuing maintenance and upkeep of the property for the current year. In 2012-13, in addition to the £43,634 received from the UK community, £12,074 has been received in overseas donations, leaving a shortfall of £74,292.

Guardian 's Resting Place Endowment Fund	Goal For the Year
	£
Goal for the year	130,000
Contributions	55,708
Shortfall to 31 Jan 2013	-74,292

Figure 10: Guardian’s Resting Place Endowment during the year and balances as at 31 January 2013

E. CAPITAL PROJECTS FUND

Currently the Capital Projects Fund, which deals with major holdings such as the Edinburgh Centre, is in deficit by £279,900 (compared to £321,973 in 2011/12)

A number of friends are helping the National Assembly in trying to address this by supporting the friends in bridging this gap.

Properties	Amount
	£
Edinburgh Centre	-233,687
Rutland Gate	-46,213
Shortfall 31 January 2013	-279,900

Figure 11: Capital Projects Funds during the year and balances as at 31 January 2013

F. THE INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION FUND

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

The UK Baha'i community has been engaged in this programme for a number of years now. The Universal House of Justice has again invited the UK Bahá'í community to participate in the programme and the National Assembly has decided that this community will commit to donating £160,000 toward the goal of £1.5 million, which is more than 10% of the total! Some £64,000 has already been raised, leaving a balance of £96,000 to be contributed between now and Rīḍván 2016.

During the year the UK Community has been blessed to contribute £34,310 (\$55,000) to the purchase of a Bahá'í Centre in Nigeria.

International Funds currently contributed to

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

1. Bahá'í International Fund
2. International Collaboration Fund
3. International Endowment Fund
4. International Deputisation Fund
5. Temples Fund
6. Chile Temple Fund
7. European Temple Fund
8. Continental Board of Counsellors Fund
9. Continental Pioneering Committee Fund

G. THE YEAR AHEAD

The National Assembly has decided to move its financial year by one month to be the same as a calendar year, moved from '1 February–31 January' to '1 January-31 December'. This will give more time for our auditors to prepare the approved accounts for the National Convention and also reduces confusion or mistakes when we refer to the accounts of a particular year. In this case the budget for 2013 will only be for 11 months running from 1 February 2013 to 31 December 2013. From next year, the budget for 2014 will be for the year 1 January to 31 December 2014. The budget for the year ahead is available from the Finance Office table as a separate document. There are a few highlights that deserve some reflection.

For 2013 managing the budget will be a challenge, as it is feared that we will have a deficit of £86,488 (in 2012-13 the deficit was £83,653). Despite the financial situation in the world, the National Spiritual Assembly is hoping that the friends will increase their contributions to the National Fund by about 20% if we are to ensure no deficit in the 2013 budget.

The budget for 2013 for the growth of the Faith (Training Institute, the Councils, and related activities) has been set at £258,414 representing about 20% of total expenditure, nevertheless there might be some reforecasting during 2013 due to changes in the community's requirements and our efforts and expectations surrounding the growth of the Faith and the impact of the youth conference in July 2013. The National Assembly remains committed to placing an ever-greater portion of its resources at the grassroots level for the growth of the Faith.

The budget for donations to International Funds for 2013 is set at £336,293. This represents 27% of expenditure and, when realised, will mean that for every £1 (excluding Gift Aid) donated by a believer to the National Fund, 47 pence will be donated to the International Funds.

The National Assembly has established a deputisation fund for the London Youth Conference called by the Universal House of Justice. Friends are encouraged to contribute to this historic event, which will host over 1000 Bahá'í youth and their friends.

The Finance Office enjoys the services of two full time employees and also benefits from six valiant volunteers without whose support the National Assembly could not run its Finance Office. Our great thanks to them all.

H. CHALLENGES

Like last year, there are a number of financial challenges for the coming year:

- the London youth conference cost will be a huge investment which has not been budgeted and it needs sacrificial support from the community,
 - meeting the needs of the Capital Projects Fund, which is in deficit by £233,687,
 - the ever-growing need of the National Fund to support the progress of the Plan,
 - starting the year with an unbalanced budget with a deficit of £86,488,
 - raising funds for the Guardian's Resting Place Endowment Fund and its refurbishments,
 - lack of rental income from Bridge House as 1.5 floors are currently empty.
- The National Assembly is actively looking for new tenants

- only 29% of households, which is 16% of the community contributes directly to the National Fund on at least an annual basis (universal participation).

But the underlying challenge is always a spiritual one:

All, no matter how modest their resources, must participate. Upon the degree of self-sacrifice involved in these individual contributions will directly depend the efficacy and the spiritual influence which these nascent administrative institutions, called into being through the power of Bahá'u'lláh, and by virtue of the Design conceived by the Centre of His Covenant, will exert.

(Shoghi Effendi, August 1957)

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The vast majority of the work of the Cause is undertaken by volunteers who labour ceaselessly, sacrificially, by day and by night, in a myriad of capacities. Some serve quietly in the background, almost invisible, others are in the forefront of the work. Some have the opportunity of devoting a significant period of their lives - perhaps one or more years to full-time or part-time service. Some are long-standing believers, with considerable experience, others are newly enrolled with a special dynamism, vision and energy, and yet others have yet to enrol and are labouring side-by-side with their co-workers in the field. It is true to say that there are literally thousands of souls in the United Kingdom that are rendering outstanding service to the Cause as an expression of their love for Bahá'u'lláh and their fellow men and their desire to see the fulfilment of His Mission and the creation of a just, prosperous and united society. To each and every one of these precious souls, “gems of inestimable value”, the National Spiritual Assembly expresses its gratitude.

National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom
May 2013