

Faith & Belief Forum and the British Academy

Tender for submissions

Cohesive Societies Companion Review: The Place of Faith & Belief in Social Cohesion

The British Academy is developing a programme of activities on Cohesive Societies. To inform this work, the Academy is working with The Faith & Belief Forum to commission a Companion Review that will sit alongside the programme's existing [Literature Review](#) and [Policy Review](#). This will explore connection between faith and belief and social cohesion in the UK, with a particular focus on practice.

We use 'faith and belief' as a term to refer to all religions, faiths and non-religious beliefs. We use 'faith and belief groups' in the broadest sense to refer to informal communities and social action related to faith and belief as well as places of worship.

About the British Academy's Cohesive Societies programme

How can societies remain cohesive in the face of rapid political, social, economic and technological change? Through this cross-cutting programme, the British Academy is drawing on our expertise and knowledge to enlighten these issues through debate, publication and research.

The exploratory phase of this programme, including this publication, aims to capture existing work in relation to societal cohesion under five key themes: cultural memory and tradition; the social economy; meanings and mechanisms of social responsibility; identity and belonging; and care for the future.

thebritishacademy.ac.uk/cohesive-societies

Background

Successive governments have expressed an ambition to make society fairer, more prosperous, 'big', or 'shared'. Yet there persist serious problems of inequality, deprivation, prejudice and discrimination, and various forms of social and spatial division. The Cohesive Societies programme therefore asks how we can best sustain a society that is prosperous, and that accommodates dissent, conflict and change whilst maintaining sufficient stability and cohesion.

Simultaneously, whilst the role of the religious and the secular in society remains highly contested, it is clear that faith and belief is never far from the public agenda and consciousness. The way people identify with and practice religion is changing. Migration and demographic change further contribute to this rapidly evolving landscape. However, Census data and other surveys consistently show that at least half of the UK still identifies with a religion. Faith-based social action makes a huge contribution to local communities, reducing poverty and loneliness and tackling ecological issues. The potential for faith and belief to be a key part of social cohesion cannot be missed.

As identified by the Cohesive Societies Literature Review, much of the government's social cohesion agenda emerged from institutions wanting to turn the lens on faith communities after the 2001 riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham. Despite this, initial research by the Faith & Belief Forum has revealed that faith and belief is not always considered in policy and practice about societal cohesion. Furthermore, where the Cohesive Societies Literature Review and Policy Reviews have started to explore these questions, there has been an acknowledgement that faith and belief have not been sufficiently considered. Hence the need for this Companion Review.

When government and institutions plan work on societal and community cohesion, where is faith and belief considered and where is it not? When faith and belief groups are consulted who takes responsibility for this, how are they selected, and what agency do they have? Are faith and belief groups understood as positive builders of cohesion or perceived more negatively as potential barriers to cohesion? How should cohesion initiatives and faith and belief groups in the UK be working together to help sustain a cohesive society? How should this be measured and assessed?

Purpose

The aim of this review is to examine the social cohesion policy and practice landscape to understand where this policy and practice include and exclude faith and belief groups, and why.

This review will

- a) Examine practical case studies of local, regional and national social cohesion initiatives that explicitly and deliberately engage with faith and belief, or are led by faith and belief groups themselves, to highlight gaps, best practice and suggest ways forward.
- b) Identify and evaluate how social cohesion policy frameworks engage with faith and belief

Explore the presence and absence of faith and belief groups in social cohesion initiatives, and the role they play in generating cohesion, suggesting new directions for more inclusive and effective policy and practice.

The Review

The review should:

- a) With reference to the existing Cohesive Societies Policy Review, map recent policy and practice addressing social cohesion and examine the place of faith and belief within it. What agency do faith and belief groups have in social cohesion and how do they use this? Are they seen as part of the problem or the solution? Are some faith and belief groups more involved than others? Is engagement genuine or tokenistic?
- b) Examine potential barriers. Are there particular reasons why faith and belief groups might not get involved in social cohesion initiatives? How is trust gained and built? Are there reasons (actual or perceived) why institutions might not feel confident to work meaningfully with faith and belief groups? (for example, different

- understandings of secularity, impact of media portrayal of faith and belief groups, attitudes towards British Values, the securitisation of community relations)
- c) Identify specific locations and initiatives in the UK where faith and belief groups are particularly involved in building cohesive societies. Provide case studies of local, regional and national examples. Are they being led by state or non-state actors? What initiatives have worked well. Which have not? How is success measured?
 - d) Ask how engagement with faith and belief has changed over time, at what level and by whom. Have changing public attitudes and political priorities impacted the role of faith and belief in social cohesion?
 - e) Consider the outcomes of the Cohesive Societies Literature and Policy Reviews, and the five themes that underpin these studies mentioned above, with a faith and belief lens. Consider if any additional themes should be included, for example respect, dignity or ecology.
 - f) Identify the gaps in policy and practice and what more could be done. Suggest potential directions for future social cohesion work and policy development.
 - g) Clearly present its purpose, approach, results, and limitations. Be rigorous and credible in its approach and use best practice techniques where possible.

Deliverables and timeframe *(may be subject to discussion/agreement)*

August	Proposals submitted to Faith & Belief Forum by Wednesday 28 th August. Please email Tim Mortimer on tim@faithbeliefforum.org
By early September	Interviews, contractor confirmed and review starts
End of October	First draft of review provided
November	Faith & Belief Forum provides comments on first draft of the review from an expert, interdisciplinary steering group made up of Fellows of the British Academy and grassroots practitioners
December	Second draft of review submitted
December – January	Final version of the review signed off by the Steering Group and contractor presents work to key stakeholders

Budget

The budget for the review is £10k, including VAT. Applicants should make proposals which will enable them to complete their work within these budgets.

The Faith & Belief Forum is happy to consider proposals from single individuals, from consortia/research groups and from separate entities.

The review will be conducted in consultation with the British Academy’s Cohesive Societies Working Group and this group is likely to publish an overarching commentary based on the conclusions.

Application Format

Applications should be concise (a maximum of 1200 words plus indicative references/bibliography) and should include the following:

- a) A summary of the applicant's understanding of the context and requirements of the review;
- b) A proposal of how the applicant will meet the review objectives laid out above, including how case studies involving faith groups will be sourced and utilised;
- c) An outline of the scope, an overview of the work plan, and an indicative schedule that is practical in the time and budget available;
- d) Links to examples of previous work;
- e) A plan for how the applicant will communicate with the Faith & Belief Forum and manage the review;
- f) A breakdown of the costs within the specified budget and any other financial details.

Applications should be emailed to Tim Mortimer on tim@faithbeliefforum.org by Wednesday 28th August.

Conflicts of interest

The applicant is required to declare any potential conflicts of interest.

About the Faith & Belief Forum

The Faith & Belief Forum has worked tirelessly for over 20 years to build good relations between people of all faiths and beliefs, and to create a society where difference is celebrated.

We create spaces in schools, universities, workplaces and the wider community where people can engage with questions of belief and identity and meet people different from themselves. Enabling people to learn from each other in this way is often the most effective way to tackle ignorance and challenge stereotypes – and create understanding and trust between people. Our programmes reach over 20,000 people a year.

faithbeliefforum.org

About the British Academy

The British Academy is the UK's national body for the humanities and social sciences – the study of peoples, cultures and societies, past, present and future. We have three principal roles: as an independent fellowship of world-leading scholars and researchers; a funding body that supports new research, nationally and internationally; and a forum for debate and engagement – a voice that champions the humanities and social sciences.

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