

Tackling Religion-Based Hate Crime on Campus: Faith Ambassadors Project

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Summary

Hate crime in Higher Education can have a considerable impact on student wellbeing, academic attainment, student retention, institutional reputation as well as future student recruitment (Universities UK 2016). The report 'Changing the Culture' (2016) by the Universities UK Task Force found that incidents of harassment, hate crime and violence do happen at UK universities, and highlighted a need for institutions to respond more effectively. As a follow up to this report, 'Changing the Culture: One Year On' (2018) found that progress was being made since the 2016 report, but more needed to be done. In light of this, the Office for Students (OfS) funded 11 universities in England with over £480,000 to tackle religion-based hate crime on campus. One of these projects was 'Faith Ambassadors' at Nottingham Trent University (NTU). In line with Nottingham City's values of 'Nottingham Together' and 'More in Common', the aim of the Faith Ambassadors project is to prevent and tackle religion-based hate crime by promoting the positive values of faith – both at University and beyond – with voices from across the NTU student community. Correspondingly, a key finding of the evaluation of the Faith Ambassadors project includes Faith Ambassadors making a difference in the local community by building an interfaith dialogue through events and visits, and establishing a genuine sense of community and tolerance both on- and off-campus (including online).

Introduction

Defining Hate Crime

Hate crime refers to existing criminal offences where the victim is targeted on the basis of one or more “protected characteristics”: race, religion, sexual orientation, disability and transgender identity (College of Policing 2014). Criminal justice agencies in England and Wales are required to monitor five strands of hate crime:

- Race: any racial group or ethnic background, including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups and country of origin.
- Religion/faith: any religious group and including those who are not religious.
- Sexual orientation: people of any sexual orientation, including heterosexual.
- Transgender: including those whose lived gender or gender identity is different from that assigned to them, with or without a Gender Recognition Certificate under the Gender Recognition Act 2003, plus those proposing to transition and/or who identify as gender variant, gender fluid, non-binary, transsexual or transvestite.
- Disability: people with any disability including physical and mental.

The five strands of monitored hate crime are the minimum categories that the police are expected to record. Locally, police forces can extend their own policy response to include other categories to be protected groups of hate crime. In addition to the five protected characteristics recorded nationally, Nottinghamshire Police specifically record hate crimes against two further categories:

- Alternative Subculture: a group that is characterised by a strong sense of collective identity and a set of group-specific values and tastes that typically centre on distinctive style/clothing, make-up, body art and music preferences.
- Misogyny: incidents against women that are motivated by prejudice and includes behaviour targeted at women simply because of their gender. Examples of this may include uninvited sexual advances, physical or verbal assault, sending uninvited messages or taking photographs without consent.

Nottinghamshire Police acknowledge that other groups of people may be targeted through prejudice, and so the force also has the recording category of 'other'.

Hate Crime has an effect not just on the victim, but on entire communities. Hate Crime acts as a 'message crime', perceived to send a message of hostility to all who may identify with a certain identity. There were 105,090 hate crimes recorded by the police in England and Wales in year ending March 2020 (excluding Greater Manchester police) an increase of eight per cent compared with year ending March 2019 (97,446 offences) (Home Office 2020). As in previous years, the majority of hate crimes were race hate crimes, accounting for around three-quarters of offences (72%; 76,070 offences). Specifically, race hate crimes increased by six per cent between year ending March 2019 and year ending March 2020. Religious hate crimes fell by five per cent (to 6,822 offences), sexual orientation hate crimes increased by 19 per cent (to 15,835), disability hate crimes increased by nine per cent (to 8,469) and transgender identity hate crimes increased by 16 per cent (to 2,540). However, hate crime remains a hugely underreported crime and these figures are likely to only reflect the tip of the iceberg.

Tackling religion-based hate crime on campus

In 2018, 11 universities in England received funding of over £480,000 from OfS for projects to tackle religion-based hate crime affecting students. The need for universities to respond more effectively to issues of student safeguarding was highlighted in the report 'Changing the Culture' (2016) by the Universities UK Task Force. The aim of the report was to explore the nature and scale of student safeguarding issues in HE. In order to do this, the Universities UK Taskforce considered evidence from individual universities, the National Union of Students and other organisations including Rape Crisis, Tell MAMA, the Union of Jewish Students and Stonewall. The evidence suggested that despite some positive activity, university responses are not as comprehensive, systematic and joined-up as they could be. In brief, the Taskforce identified a number of recommended actions for universities and Universities UK. These covered several areas including (Universities UK 2016):

- Senior leadership
- Adopting an institution-wide approach
- Encouraging positive behaviours
- Working with the students' union

- Having effective governance, data collection and staff training
- Sharing of good practice across the university sector

In 2018, Universities UK published the report 'Changing the Culture: One Year On', which was an update on the 2016 'Changing the Culture' report. This was a qualitative study based on research carried out by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, and assessed the sector's progress in England, Wales and Northern Ireland in implementing recommendations from the 2016 report 'Changing the culture'. Specifically, the research involved interviews and group discussions with over 100 senior sponsors, and 20 higher education providers. The report found that (Universities UK 2018):

- Success in the sector was significant, but variable
- Active senior leadership is vital in how far institutions can progress
- There has been an increase in disclosures in the past year, a positive indication of cultural change
- The scale of the Higher Education Funding Council for England Catalyst safeguarding funding of £2.45m accelerated and supported change across England's Higher Education sector
- Institutions reported barriers to progress remained including sustainable funding for resources, training for students and staff across larger institutions, and maintaining a consistent approach across the sector

Against this background, the Higher Education Funding Council for England developed a student safeguarding scheme under its Catalyst Fund to support the sector in making improvements (OfS 2020). The first phase of investment was launched in March 2017, with 63 projects sharing £2.45 million to address sexual harassment on campus. The second phase, to tackle hate crime and online harassment, was launched in October 2017 and awarded £1.8 million across 45 projects. The third phase of the funding programme was launched in March 2018 and it specifically addressed religion-based hate crime affecting students. Operating as a collaborative network across England, the aim of the third phase was to (OfS 2018):

- Establish and strengthen reporting mechanisms and support new infrastructure and facilities
- Facilitate strong mechanisms and support for safeguarding, both on- and off-campus (including online), working with partner agencies such as the police and third sector hate crime reporting centres
- Build and sustain religious literacy among students and staff, including challenging misconceptions
- Support the development of effective role models for students of a particular religion or belief
- Develop and sustain positive campus relations between different groups
- Build greater community cohesion on campus, including safe and respectful approaches to freedom of speech and on-campus debate

- Develop responses to politically motivated hate crime which targets students of a particular religion or belief.

This is a list of the funded projects for the third phase, which aimed to address religion-based hate crime affecting students (OfS 2020):

Lead provider	Project	Amount awarded
University of Bath	Tackling religiously-based hate crime: Extending the University community approach	£50,000
Coventry University	Tackling religion-based hate crime on the multi-faith campus	£49,681
Durham University	Religious Hate Crime in the North East: Driving Interventions for Acceptance, Reporting and Supporting	£50,000
King's College London	It Stops Here: Religious Based Hate Crime	£50,000
University of Leicester	Standing Together Against Religiously-Motivated Hate	£36,000
London School of Economics	Changing the culture: creating a faith-inclusive campus	£21,873
University of Manchester	Passivity, the Bystander and Religious-Based Hate Crime	£50,000
Northumbria University	Responding to Religious-based Hate Crime on Campus	£40,499
Nottingham Trent University	Faith Ambassadors	£43,780

Faith Ambassadors project

In line with Nottingham City's values of 'Nottingham Together' and 'More in Common', the aim of the Faith Ambassadors (FA) project is to prevent and tackle religion-based hate crime by promoting the positive values of faith – both at University and beyond – with voices from across the NTU student community. The project also aims to build safe interfaith dialogue spaces through events, visits to places of worship, and to establish a genuine sense of community and tolerance. The project draws upon the five key areas of focus identified in the UK government's plan for tackling hate crime (2016)¹, with particular emphasis on preventing hate crime. Bringing people together is a big part of the project's commitment to developing an informed and truly representative dialogue. In the academic year 2019-20, the project had a team of 32 faith ambassador students who came from all over the world – a diverse group of students with different faiths or no faith.



📷 Diverse faith traditions sharing their perspective on prayer at the Global Lounge

¹ The five key areas of focus identified in the UK government's plan for tackling hate crime (2016) include: preventing hate crime; responding to hate crime in our communities; increasing the reporting of hate crime; improving support for the victims of hate crime; building our understanding of hate crime.

Evaluation of Faith Ambassador project

The evaluation of the FA project was conducted by Brianna Lewis as part of the Work-Based Research Project Module, led by Dr Irene Zempi (CRIM40220 module, MA Criminology Course, NTU). The aim of the study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the FA project drawing on the views and experiences of faith ambassadors. The research objectives of the study were to examine:

1. Significance of the FA project
2. Challenges of the FA team
3. Recommendations for actions

With regards to the methodology employed, this was a qualitative study which involved individual, semi-structured interviews with six faith ambassador students, and one focus group interview with the FA project leaders. Due to covid-19, the number of faith ambassadors being available to take part in the research was limited, and the interviews took place online (on Microsoft Teams) rather than in-person. The individual and focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data were analysed thematically, guided by the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The following section uses illustrative extracts from the individual and focus group interviews with participants (presented as indented quotes) in order to provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data.

Findings

Theme 1: Faith ambassadors promoting the positive values of faith both on and off campus

Throughout interviews, faith ambassadors who took part in the study reported that they participated in a number of events, both on and off campus, in order to promote the positive values of faith. For example, they argued that they were involved in a number of external events and projects, such as engaging with local faith and community leaders, taking part in a Student Society led Hate Crime Panel, volunteering at Salaam Shalom kitchen (SASH)² and visiting places of worship in Nottingham and elsewhere in the UK such as the Cathedral and Metropolitan Church of Saint Peter in York – commonly known as York Minster.

² SASH is a joint enterprise led by the Nottingham Liberal Synagogue and the Muslim charity, Himmah aimed at providing a safe place where members of the public who are struggling can go and obtain a free meal.



📷 Preparing food at the Muslim and Jewish community café, Salaam Shalom



📷 Interfaith dialogue with community faith leaders

This provided faith ambassadors with valuable opportunities to connect with people with different backgrounds outside the university, and have discussions on the issues of faith, diversity and hate crime, as demonstrated in the following quotes:

“The faith ambassador role comes with interacting with different people from different generations and different walks of life [] It gives me access to people who are very different and very unique to certain ideologies.” FA2

“It [Faith Ambassadors project] allows different persons from faith and non-faith backgrounds to come together, to express their beliefs and to share their experiences of how that multi-cultural space allows them to better interact with people that they wouldn’t have had that experience of interacting with outside of the church space.” FA3

“We [faith ambassadors] are doing a lot to help; in the community, in NTU and outside of NTU as well.” FA4



Visiting local Hindu temple for a community meal and discussion

In addition to external events, faith ambassadors reported that they were involved in designing, delivering and/or promoting a number of events and festivals on campus such as 'NTU Global Week' and 'Hate Crime Awareness Week 2019'. NTU Global Week is the biggest celebration of cultural diversity at NTU.



Faith Ambassadors at Global Week Event



Faith Ambassador Faris Alkayyal speaking at Stakeholder event hosted by NTU Faith

Through art, dancing, sport, and food, NTU Global Week connects and celebrates the different cultural heritages of NTU students and provides opportunities for students and staff to extend their international outlook. Hate Crime Awareness Week is a national week of action to encourage local authorities, key partners and communities affected by hate crime to work together to tackle local hate crime issues. At these events, faith ambassadors acted as representatives of the FA project, promoting diversity, raising awareness about hate crime, and having an open dialogue around faith and no faith. The quote below demonstrates one of the FA project activities taking place during Hate Crime Awareness Week 2019.

“Faith Ambassadors had a Stall Event in Newton at NTU between 11am-2pm on Friday 18 October 2019. Five Faith Ambassadors came to the Newton Building and assisted Robina in setting up the Hate Crime Awareness stall in honour of it being Hate Crime Awareness Week and Black History Month. They brought with them sweets, a pure white tree, string and had to cut up flashcard size coloured papers in order for people to write a pledge on what they would do differently after knowing what a hate crime is and that it was hate crime awareness week, if they didn’t already know. The aim was to firstly, get as many people involved, the treats were one way to break the ice! Secondly, to make them aware that as NTU students, they are able to anonymously report a Hate Crime through the Student Union, whether they encounter it themselves or they know other people who encounter hate crime or if they are a bystander. Thirdly, to invite them to write a pledge to stick to the tree. Fourthly, if they consent, to have their pictures taken with the Faith Ambassadors and cardboard cut out which says “Don’t Let Hate Build Walls. [] Overall, the turnout was really great! We managed to fill the tree with everyone’s pledge writings within 45 minutes. According to the picture of the tree, I believe we got over, if not more, 100 students and some staff members to write a pledge in honour of it being Hate Crime Awareness Week. For me, the pure white tree was a symbol of a colour which united us all, despite our race, ethnicity, culture, religion, beliefs, lifestyles. It did not matter where we came from as long as we had the same view of helping others and ourselves in firstly knowing that hate crime exists, how we can tackle and report it, how to help others and lastly and most importantly, making an effort to take the initiative and make changes to how we, ourselves, respond to people who are visibly different.” FA1



Dhruvi Shah, Faith: Jain

Theme 2: Faith ambassadors making a difference in the local community

The consensus view amongst the faith ambassadors who took part in the research was that the project was making a difference in the wider community through its positive discourse around faith and their involvement in community projects and events, both on and off campus (and online). Through the project, faith ambassadors were able to share their knowledge and experiences with the student body, encouraging more open and positive dialogue around faith on campus as well as awareness of hate crime: namely what it means and how to report it. Faith ambassadors saw this role as a 'badge of honour', standing against hate crime and promoting diversity and inclusion on campus. This sends a strong message of support and acceptance for students of faith or no faith, and diversity more generally.

"You want persons to be made aware that really and truly as a university, we don't stand for this thing [hate crime]. Through knowledge, and through sharing experiences, we can let people know, that we can all live together with our differences, and still be humane to each other." FA3



Faith Ambassadors at Sikh Exhibition Event

Theme 3: Faith ambassadors developing 'skills for life'

Participants shared positive feedback about their involvement in the group, and emphasised how important this experience was to developing their personal as well as their professional skills. As highlighted in the focus group interview, this role provided faith ambassadors with 'skills for life'. Faith ambassadors praised the training that they received as part of this role. The training entailed community organising, understanding different types of religiously motivated hate crime such as Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and anti-Sikh hate crime as well as the development of certain skills and attributes such as building confidence, communication and leadership skills, as demonstrated in the quotes below.

"I think that being a part of the NTU Faith group, strengthened me in my confidence as well in tackling these types of situations, because it gave me the knowledge in terms of how to distinguish when something wrong is taking place." FA1

"You get trained, you get confidence building training and you get specific Islamophobia, anti-Semitism training and teamwork training. Then at the end, all the events we do, they are logged against an award called the accelerate award, which is an employability award." FA2

"It has given me a lot of confidence and it has given me a lot of experience and leadership qualities, and it has helped me out in team working. So I think these things as a graduate are very important in a work environment, which will benefit the employer." FA6



Na Qing, Faith: Exploring Spirituality

By being part of the group, faith ambassadors were also able to connect, engage and work alongside students from a diverse faith background in a space where open discussion on faith and diversity was encouraged. This gave them the opportunity to learn about other faiths and cultures from fellow faith ambassadors, other students as well as people who they engaged with at FA events. Faith ambassadors noted how this role changed them as individuals, as demonstrated in the quotes below:

“I have sharpened my knowledge in this field and just being a better human being in general.” FA1

“I feel that I am, I hope that I am, a better person now through this role. It has not just changed others and the people I worked with, but actually, it has changed me. I think that has really helped me as a person.” FA2

“The project allowed me to be more accepting of diversity and multi-culturalism in a global space. At the end of the day, you have to interact with people who may not be from your background, and who may not share similar beliefs and values as you do, but you still have to give them the dignity and the respect that they deserve as human beings. I believe that this is a lifelong lesson. It’s a thing that I can take into any aspect of my life, whether through education, through religion, through any social activity that I may take part in.” FA3

“They may not be on the same path as me, but I am able to learn from them and they can learn from me as well.” FA4



Mel Chilekwa, Faith: Christian

Theme 4: Recommendations for action

Faith ambassadors offered recommendations in order to strengthen the FA project even further. The main recommended actions involved having more events on campus, especially events which would be specifically hosted by NTU faith ambassadors. Participants felt that doing this would raise awareness of the FA project further and encourage more students to join, increasing the outreach of the FA project. Additionally, there were suggestions for organising more faith-specific events, which would help promote the positive values of faith further. Relatedly, faith ambassadors suggested wider university involvement in events, investing further on collaborations with different departments, schools and student groups within the university. As such, faith ambassadors wanted to expand their reach further, spread awareness of what is hate crime, and how to report it, as well as promoting dialogue around faith in the wider community, achieving the highest impact possible through the mission of the FA project.

FA project (for academic year 2020-2021)

The covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdown for this academic year caused NTU Faith to move their engagement and activities online. This fortuitously enabled NTU Faith to encourage the faith ambassador students to participate more extensively and creatively in the online events delivered during lockdown. A wide range of exciting online events were hosted, which brought together students, staff and community such as the online Iftar Meal and Ramadan celebrations. What appeared to make these events successful was intentionally making the events celebratory, educational and inclusive. NTU Faith took the opportunity to bring together other faith traditions such as sharing their own meaning of fasting at the

Ramadan event. This created a collective sharing and learning which was connected by a sense of fun and celebration. The online event allowed the FA project to reach out to students who had travelled back across the UK and across the world to connect into the live events. This created a sense of global experience at the events. Also, faith ambassadors were at the heart of creating and delivering the online events, including the Interfaith Event, Christmas Celebration Event, Dr Martin Luther King Jr Event and the Diwali Event. In all these events, faith ambassadors were the catalyst to these events making them come alive with their newfound confidence in sharing authentic their voice at the various events. The formation of the faith ambassadors has enabled numerous online faith-based events to have student content and participation at the heart of the events and breathed a new confidence at the university in accepting and promoting the positive value of faith.

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Further information

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