

CHALLENGING STEREOTYPES ABOUT ISLAM IN SCOTTISH CIVIL SOCIETY



Inspired by Professor Hugh Goddard's research on Christian-Muslim relations both past and present, the Alwaleed Centre for the Study of Islam in the Contemporary World, partnered with the Church of Scotland in December 2011 to deliver 'Breaking Barriers'; a unique residential conference bringing together young Christians and Muslims in Scotland.

The conference led delegates through intensive scriptural reasoning sessions comparing Qur'anic and Biblical verses, introduced them to the history of Christian-Muslim relations and discussed contemporary Christian-Muslim community projects. The conference led to the creation of a 'Breaking Barriers' group in Edinburgh which now has a membership of nearly fifty people and still meets regularly.

Delegates also took the lead in organising three further day-long conferences, with the fourth scheduled for February 2015. Breaking Barriers has had a profound impact on many young people who have been involved over the years, 'Of all the interfaith experiences I have had, 'Breaking Barriers' is one of the most inspiring.' said one young delegate, 'The participants all have strong religious convictions, and when we get together, we do not downplay, deny, or ignore our differences. Instead, we try to understand each other's beliefs and practices, and make sure that we do not promote inaccurate stereotypes.'

AN IMPACT CASE STUDY



RESEARCH BACKGROUND

These projects were underpinned by the research of Professor Hugh Goddard (Christian-Muslim relations) - 'Recent developments in Christian-Muslim Relations' in S. Goodwin, ed., *World Christianity in Muslim Encounter: Essays in Honour of David A. Kerr* (London: Continuum, 2009), 2: 96-114, and Dr Timothy Peace (Muslims in Britain), 'Muslims and electoral politics in Britain: the case of Respect' in J. Nielsen, ed., *Muslims and Political Participation in Europe* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), 426-454, and selected work from Dr Anthony Gorman (Modern Middle Eastern history) and Dr Thomas Pierret (contemporary Islam).



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Between October 2012 and March 2013, the Alwaleed Centre organised a series of Continuing Professional Development seminars for police officers in the Lothian and Borders region.

The majority of the seminars were led by research staff within the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies including Dr Anthony Gorman who spoke about events unfolding in the Arab World, Dr Thomas Pierret who explored contemporary Islamic movements and their impact on the UK and Dr Timothy Peace who guided the police officers through the history and politics of Scotland's Muslim communities.

The seminars provided officers with essential information about Islam in both a national and international context and were highly valued by those who took part. As one senior officer commented, 'This was a unique opportunity for our officers to hear from experts in the field of Islamic studies. Feedback from officers has been extremely positive and the knowledge gained from the lectures will doubtless help our officers understand more about the Muslim communities they encounter and serve'.

FURTHER IMPACT

This series of seminars led to significant further engagement between the University of Edinburgh and Police Scotland.

The Alwaleed Centre was invited to sit on the Association of Chief Police Officers Religion and Belief Reference Group which meets regularly to tackle religiously-motivated hate crime in Scotland.

Research staff from the university's Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies were also asked to quality assure Police Scotland's 'Diversity Booklet', a guidance handbook which is distributed to all 17,500 police officers in Scotland.



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