

# Faith Junction

## End of second quarter report:

Art Beyond Belief's "Faith Junction" project sets out to achieve video interviews across the four major faiths represented in Slough and the surrounding areas. These faiths are *Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Christianity*.

One of the recurring questions that comes up when people hear about the project, is "In what way is this different to an opinion poll?" At first sight, it seems that what is most noticeable is the video factor, but actually the difference is significantly more than this. Anyone who has taken part in a poll of any sort will know that very often the answer to a question lies not with box A, B, or C nor with agree/disagree (strongly, mildly or



*Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims were present at the first Faith Junction workshop. Interview styles, interview manners, and how to get your point across succinctly all featured on the agenda, as did "your favourite TV interviewer". Jeremy Paxman was one of the most well thought of, as was Krishnan Guru-Murthy and Graham Norton.*

across, and (so importantly) is not culture based in the way answers that tick boxes are.

The second quarter started with various members of the



not at all) but with an answer that "agrees/disagrees provided X" (X being an option that has no box to tick) and provided that Y and Z are taken into account. Frustratingly, the choices are limited to answers that often produce a result dramatically

different to what the interviewee really means to say. The Faith Junction interview offers a subject the ability to answer in whatever way suits his/her personality; allows for a range of expression that enables them to get their point

representative faiths sharing some discussion evenings. During these evenings the purpose of the project was discussed. It was made clear that we wanted to interview the equivalent to the "man on the Clapham Omnibus," or Mr/Ms



Mark Wotherspoon. Head of Humanities at Slough and Eton Secondary School, with the first two teams of Faith Interview participants. Mark describes the project as "unique and adventurous".

Average. Not Ministers of Religion, Gurus, Priests, or Imams, but the man or woman in the pew, or on the prayer-mat. "But this means that they might say something which is contrary to established religious teaching" exclaimed a Muslim former Borough Councillor, on the first evening. "We should have their views vetted by an Imam." There were murmurs of assent and I repeated what I had said at the introduction to the evening, that Average was where it was at. I pointed out that we could get the 'official line' to any of the faiths on-line, or from the library. The unknown is what Average Really Thinks. But this is a huge risk. Various people rallied to the cause, excited by the liberation and using words like 'exciting,' 'creative,' and 'fantastic.' Our man was not convinced. "Where is the control?" he asked, "What if these people say something that is not right?" The man was now on his own. It had come down to this; "Can the Average man of faith be trusted with his interpretation of that belief?" There was a glint in the eyes of all present as they realised the full potential of what lay ahead. And also their responsibilities, both in asking and answering the interview questions. A realisation perhaps that Average may be more conservative, more harsh, than they themselves,

but (and what a hope!) perhaps, just perhaps, Average might be tolerant, forgiving and adventurous. Our man left, muttering under his breath. The rest of the evening was spent planning the structure of the project, and on deciding future dates for two more such evenings. These duly took place, and all concerned felt ready to take part in the training workshops. An approach by Slough and Eton Secondary School, to take part in the project resulted in discussions with the Head of the Humanities department, Mark Wotherspoon. He was clearly excited by the project, and the potential for his pupils, and we have agreed that somewhere between a quarter and a third of the project participants will come from secondary schools. Other schools in the area have expressed an interest in the project, and will supply pupils, who will represent the four faiths. The first workshop took place in early September, led by Emel Soylu, and Andrea Sparrow. Both had knowledge of interview techniques, Andrea having developed Art Beyond Belief's "My Story" project, (which produced video interviews across 'stigmatised communities') while Emel brought her extensive experience as researcher, editor, and journalist from 16 years at the BBC. The workshops started in a

light-hearted vein, enabling those taking part to get to know one another, and to discuss the kind of questions, (or ways of phrasing them) that would not cause offence or be likely to be taken the wrong way. At the end of each session, all those taking part agreed that the session had been worthwhile and enjoyable. Two further workshops took place later in the month.

BBC Radio Berkshire responded to a press release, and interviewed Emel in their studio at Caversham Park, Reading, on Sunday the 24th September. The interview went out live, and the producer expressed interest in following the project through to the end.

(Below) The Slough Observer featured Faith Junction in August.

