

## **Faith Guides in the West Midlands**

### Visits to places of worship much improved

#### **The need**

It is often said that school children are better informed about their fellow citizens of different faiths, than adults. Many RE teachers take their pupils to visit places of worship of different faiths so that they can learn from the experience of meeting a person and seeing a sacred place. Churches, mosques, temples and synagogues do their best to welcome and inform their young visitors and they usually go away appreciative of the visit and the faith they have glimpsed. However, except in cathedrals, those who receive them are almost always volunteers without any training, the resources they have to offer are usually written by devotees of the religion without reference to the RE syllabus and there are seldom any child friendly activities. Adult groups too, of no faith or different faiths, go away from such visits saying, 'Wasn't that wonderful !' without having really engaged with the faith in terms they could grasp. So, even in a city like Birmingham, visits to places of worship have not been as educational or inspiring as they could have been if the hosts had been better trained.

#### **The training**

The Faith Encounter Programme in Birmingham is a pioneering project working in partnership with the Institute of Tourist Guiding to train people from the places of worship as Faith Guides. 41 people of 7 different faith traditions (Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Jain, Unitarian and Buddhist – there has been no Jewish participant yet) have now completed their accredited training and are now able to transform the visitor experience at their places of worship. They have taken a part time 12 week course which included guiding skills (like health and safety, self presentation, planning a tour and answering questions), knowledge of their own faith and place of worship and understanding of other faiths. They have also had the opportunity to prepare new and more appropriate leaflets for visitors. They train together as a multi faith group and learn to respect each other's faiths, as well as developing the ability to speak about their own faith with renewed confidence and clarity. They become friends during the course and are able to ask each other the difficult questions that politeness so often prevents. The course culminates in an exam which includes a written paper and a practical presentation to a mixed faith group of their peers. There have now been three courses in Birmingham and in January, similar courses will start in Sandwell, Coventry, Wolverhampton and Walsall.

#### **The benefits to visitors and places of worship**

Faith Guides are committed members of their own faith community who have a desire to be hospitable and to present their faith and the significance of their place of worship to the public, in a relevant way. They are able to open the eyes of their visitors, of whatever age, to the meaning of strange symbols, festivals and rituals, and they can reassure people who may be fearful of what they may encounter in a place of worship. It is not only the visitors who benefit, but also the faith communities who are taking part in the programme. It enables them to address the widespread misunderstandings about the beliefs and practices of people of faith, and thus, incidentally, contribute to social cohesion.

#### **Further information**

Teachers can arrange to bring groups to Birmingham, confident that the experience will be well organised, high quality and appropriate to the needs of the group. However, there are similar schemes elsewhere and possibilities of repeating the Faith Guiding course in other centres. You can contact the Co-ordinator, Ruth Tetlow on [ruthtetlow@btinternet.com](mailto:ruthtetlow@btinternet.com). She will put you in touch with a local contact person if there is one, or advise you about running such a course yourself. The idea is not only of benefit to urban areas, because rural schools now realise their need to introduce pupils to the faith geography of the whole country, and indeed the world.

# **Faith Guiding Certificate Course**

(Birmingham)

Accredited by the Institute of Tourist Guiding Level 2

## **PROSPECTUS**

### **AIMS**

The course will provide participants with the knowledge, understanding and skills required for guiding groups of people around a specific place of worship. Places of worship will thus be equipped to offer high quality educational visits. These visits will be a means of developing respect and mutual understanding between people of all faiths and communities. Faith Guiding involves interpreting one's own faith in relation to the community, using the features of a building.

### **OBJECTIVES**

These aims will be achieved through study of three key areas:

- Knowledge and understanding of the participant's own faith
- Awareness of and competence in guiding skills
- Understanding of other faith traditions

### **PROGRAMME CONTENT**

1. Knowledge and understanding of own faith
  - a. Origins and development of the faith
  - b. Main beliefs and practices
  - c. Scriptures and other traditions
  - d. Contemporary issues and challenges
  - e. Use of features of the building
  - f. Communicating the faith to visitors
2. Guiding Skills
  - a. Communication with different client groups
  - b. Developing presentation and interpretation skills
  - c. Planning a guided tour of the building
  - d. Risk assessment, health and safety issues, special needs
  - e. Visitor administration and production of appropriate visual aids
  - f. Dealing with questions

N.B. Frequent practice in presenting to the group will be integral to the course.

3. Understanding other faiths
  - a. Learning from fellow participants
  - b. Areas of common ground
  - c. Interpretation and language awareness
  - d. Attitudes to scripture and tradition
  - e. Dealing with sensitive issues

The course will include several (usually 4) group visits to places of worship of various faiths, to witness good practice in guiding. There may also be workshop sessions e.g. using IT to prepare literature for visitors, relating to the media.

#### COURSE TUTORS

1. Faith Tutors: there will be one Faith Tutor for each of the faiths represented among the participants. Each of them will be paid for 8 hours contact time.  
They will be highly qualified and experienced members of their faith tradition who have a broad understanding of the faith as a whole and a tolerant attitude to those whose views are different from their own.
2. Guiding Skills Tutor: These skills will be taught by a Blue (or failing that, Green) Badge Guide (ITG). The Tutor should, if possible, familiarise him/herself with the places of worship that the participants come from. She or he will be paid for 18 hours of contact time.
3. Inter Faith Tutor: this person will have considerable experience and preferably a qualification, in inter faith relations. He or she will be paid for 12 hours of contact time.
4. Programme Director: This may be one of the Tutors or another person who has an overall responsibility for the smooth delivery of the course. He or she will be paid expenses and additional rates as funding permits.

#### ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS

1. Membership of a faith tradition. A reference will be required from a leader of the place of worship that the participant usually attends or equivalent.
2. Ability to communicate well in good English.
3. Commitment to attending the whole course. At least 90% attendance is required.

#### LEARNING HOURS

48 directed study hours – in class or at a place of worship.

72 private study hours - evidenced in a journal and other written work handed in in the folder provided. This can include evidence of prior learning. It should be divided between approximately 50 hours study of the participant's own faith and 22 hours study of other faith traditions.

## ASSESSMENT

1. One hour's written paper, comprising short questions. Two thirds of these are on the participant's own faith and one third on understanding other faiths. This means that different papers are needed for each faith taking part. Faith Tutors and the Interfaith Tutor set the questions and mark the papers. The Programme Director is responsible for the administration of the examinations. Results are submitted to the Institute of Tourist Guiding for verification.
2. Short guided tour. This will be an evaluation of guiding skills at the participant's own place of worship (or one of the same tradition) with an actual group of people (fellow participants). Total length 10 – 20 minutes, either a general overview or a specific feature as requested by the examiners at the time. One examiner is appointed by the Institute of Tourist Guiding and one is appointed locally by the Steering Group.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

### PROGRAME DURATION AND TIMING

Experience has shown that a weekly three hour session, including a short break for refreshment, plus workshops, is sufficient to complete the course in a 12 week period. The written and practical examinations take place in the following month.

### COST TO PARTICIPANTS

This varies according to the policy of the Steering Group and the ability of the participant to pay. It has varied from £100 to zero. Sometimes the place of worship will subsidise the cost to the participant. No-one should be prevented from taking part by inability to pay.

### RECRUITMENT

Participants are recruited mainly by distribution of an information leaflet and word of mouth. Email and all other forms of electronic communication can be used. One of the most effective methods is by asking faith leaders to put forward a member of their community. Recruits have come from people of retirement age, student age and all ages in between. The minimum age is 18 years as the Faith Guide must be capable of taking charge of a group of adults or children.

### EVALUATION

Participants and tutors are asked for their evaluation of the course experience so as to improve the quality of delivery on subsequent occasions. Both practicalities and content are evaluated. Tutors also carry out planning and evaluation in meetings.

## OUTLINE PROGRAMME (an example only)

| Date/venue                    | Topic                             | Content  | Tutor/s                 |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------------|
| Week 1<br>classroom           | Enrolment<br>Introduction         | Enrolment and induction, welcome<br>Ground rules, purpose of course<br>Introduction to Guiding skills                  | PD<br>GST               |
| Week 2<br>4 spaces            | Guiding skills<br>Faith knowledge | Communication with different clients<br>Use of visual aids and artefacts<br>Origins and dev't of the faith (groups)    | GST<br>FT x 4           |
| Week 3<br>Visit 1<br>4 spaces | Guiding skills<br>Faith knowledge | Developing presentation skills<br>Main beliefs & practices, scriptures and traditions                                  | Guide<br>FT x 4         |
| Week 4<br>4 spaces            | Guiding skills<br>Faith knowledge | Planning a guided tour – practice tour<br>Interpreting the faith, using the building<br>Preparing presentations        | GST<br>FT x 4           |
| Week 5<br>Visit 2             | Guiding skills                    | Customer care, health and safety<br>Risk Assessment – practice tour  | Guide<br>GST            |
| Week 6<br>classroom           | Guiding skills<br>Faith knowledge | Feedback from visit<br>Faith presentations<br>Arrange 2 hours meeting with FT at place of worship: issues & challenges | GST<br>FT x 4<br>FT x 4 |
| Week 7<br>classroom           | Guiding skills                    | Developing interpretation skills, production of literature<br>Planning & practising guided tour                        | GST                     |
| Week 8<br>Visit 3             | Guiding skills<br>Other faiths    | Example of guided tour, visitor administration<br>Listening and speaking about faith                                   | Guide<br>IFT            |
| Week 9<br>classroom           | Other faiths<br>Guiding skills    | Areas of common ground<br>Dealing with questions   | IFT<br>GST              |
| Week 10<br>Visit 4            | Guiding skills<br>Guiding skills  | Receiving school groups<br>Practising guided tour, dealing with problems. Exam preparation                             | Guide<br>GST            |
| Week 11<br>classroom          | Other faiths<br>Guiding skills    | Interpretation and language, scripture & tradition – misconceptions<br>Guided tour: example of bad practice            | IFT<br>GST              |
| Week 12<br>classroom          | Guiding skills<br>Other faiths    | Final practice of guided tour<br>Dealing with sensitive issues<br>Conclusion, evaluation, appreciation                 | GST<br>IFT              |

PD: Programme Director, GST: Guiding Skills Tutor, FT: Faith Tutors, IFT: Inter FaithTutor

There is usually a week's break after Week 6.

The 1 hour written examination follows about 4 weeks later and the assessed guided tour the following week, by arrangement with the examiners.

An Awards Ceremony is arranged about a month later, at which certificates and badges are presented, photographs of the assessed guided tours displayed and success celebrated.