

The Religion and Belief Awareness Day for staff and councillors was held on 29 November 2011, supported by a number of local community belief groups. The event comprised a series of talks on different religions and a display area with information on a much wider array of beliefs.

Attendance

The event was well attended with probably more than the numbers below as not everyone signed the attendance sheets. The audience included Council staff, police staff who share the Council office accommodation and members of the public from local belief groups.

30	Differences between Christian denominations
31	Islam
20	Humanism
18	Atheism
20	Christian outreach in Guildford
23	Judaism
28	Information display

Scores for talks

Talks were scored 1-5, with 1 meaning not very informative or interesting and 5 meaning very informative and interesting. The vast majority of scores were 4s and 5s. Only 4 people scored any of the talks lower than 4 out of 5. The most popular talk (looking at scores) was the one on Christian outreach work in Guildford which no-one scored lower than 4 out of 5.

Scores for information display

The same scoring system was applied to the information displays on the various different beliefs. The vast majority of the scores were 4s and 5s. Only 4 people scored any of the information lower than 4 out of 5.

Feedback from participants

Many people took the opportunity to write comments on the feedback sheets.

General comments

- I thoroughly enjoyed this event. It was so interesting and I think that more people would benefit from attending.
- I thought that the presentations I attended were very good and attracted much more interest than I had expected. In the current climate people find it difficult to discuss religion or belief in the workplace for fear of causing offence to others so it was particularly good to have a controlled environment in which these discussions could take place. It was quite intellectually stimulating.
- I could only attend two talks but was impressed with the relaxed attitude displayed in the sessions and the good humour – essential when discussing matters that many see as fundamental to their daily lives. Both speakers were excellent with interesting presentations and informal but engaging styles.
- All very much worth hearing. The Humanist presentation was particularly illuminating. The most entertaining was the Atheism talk.

Things people learned which they hadn't realised before:

- The importance of the head and hair in Islam, Sikhism, Buddhism, Orthodox Judaism and Hinduism.
- That there are so many similarities between religions.
- The huge differences in religious outlooks and how that might impact on working practices.

- The validity of Humanism.
- That the workplace prayer group welcomes non-believers.
- The requirement for same day burial for Jews.

Things people will do differently as a result:

- Be more sensitive to others' beliefs and try to stop saying God all the time!
- Have more appreciation of the different religions and the commitment that's involved.
- Just have a better understanding and be able to understand other people's attitudes.
- Appreciate that we're all different and be more understanding.
- Better appreciate the work of the Street Angels.

Best thing about the event:

- The atmosphere of tolerant but intelligent discussion – respect for everyone's point of view.
- Its diversity and range.
- Getting to hear from people about their beliefs.
- That you organised an event such as this.
- The explanation of different religions.
- The variety of speakers and the question and answer session.
- The displays which showed key points about the different beliefs. It was a quick way to get a good overview of information.
- The speakers were open and honest. There didn't seem to be a hidden agenda to convert people.
- The opportunity to discuss beliefs and ideas with colleagues.
- Understanding different religions.

Suggestions for improvements:

- Longer slots for the talks to allow more time for questions.
- Longer final session for debate or discussion with all speakers.
- Speakers from more religions.
- Opportunity to submit questions for speakers in advance.
- Give more notice of the event.
- Hold the event annually.