



08 Key successes and reasons for closure

I am writing what follows with some sadness, some trepidation and some humility. Whilst I was the first, and only, holder of the role of *webmeister* for the Shap Working Party, I have held two other offices: that of Treasurer for the last eight years, following in the footsteps of some truly great names, including that of John Finel, who held the office for 15 years and who you can read about in the obituaries; and that of Chair and co-Chair for the last three years standing on the shoulders of some true giants of the RE world, past and still very much present.

The sadness comes from being the chair who will close down the working party, but we are leaving not with a whimper but with a bang, and there is a great sense of 'full circle' as Shap will close in the place it began 50 years ago – in the small Cumbrian town of Shap. As can be read of later in this document Shap is, in many ways, a victim of its own success, as the organizations that have sprung from its loins have taken over many of the activities that we once originated, organized and led. This has meant that in the last 10 years there has been less generative activity than previously from Shap members, apart from the three versions of the calendar; and the advent of electronic and on-line competitors, and significant monetary outgoings meant that Shap was in some financial crises in 2012 and only swift action by the treasurer in 2013 saved the organization from being declared bankrupt! The decision to close has been taken neither lightly nor quickly, and whilst hard work by the treasurer and the calendar group ensured that Shap has enough finance now to close well, it has been agreed that now it is time to close.

The name of Shap will carry on with the calendar group as there is still a demand for the calendar in its new forms consisting of the e-Cal with the Pictorial Calendar and the A2 glossy wallchart; and hard work by the calendar sub-group has grown again our client demand with about 2000 calendars sold last year – in one format or the other. We now have customers from schools, hospitals, banks, prisons, local authorities and plans in mind to develop a *ShApp* version of the calendar.

So on to a brief outline of the achievements of Shap over the last 50 years - you can read more about the 'early years' of Shap by looking at John Rankin's excellent article '30 years on – an article on the history of Shap' which can be found in this collection.



Shap is a Working Party, and my, how it has worked! In the years 1969 to 1993 it organised some 55 two or three day Conferences, as well as a number of one day sessions and a small selection of ten day long overseas visits. Since 1969 up until 2009 it has produced untold numbers of bibliographies, schemes of work, Mailings; and for 32 years annual Journals, the latter comprising 650 Articles; these came in printed form at first and are now all online on the website at www.shapworkingparty.org.uk/journals.html (the complete set can also be found in this collection). Furthermore, *Shap* has granted Awards to sixteen creative individuals or groups who have developed interesting and innovative approaches to our field of study – details of which can again be found in this collection.

For 50 years *Shap* has produced an annual Calendar of Festivals in the world's religions, initially in cyclostyled format, then in printed booklet form, and since 2012 as an online version with an enlarged and enhanced booklet. This is now accompanied by an A2 colourful printed Wallchart and by an annual Pictorial eCalendar, where each edition gives access to 12 of David Rose's splendid photographs (from 2003-2011 in printed format, and from 2012 to 2018 via an online key).

In our attempts to spread the gospel of World Religions in Education, Members of the Working Party have written many books, both scholarly and educational, in their own names; and in addition they have contributed to a range of creative booklets, books and articles, all to some degree emanating from *Shap*.

Shap has been at the forefront and alongside the changes in the teaching of religious education in schools from those early days of bible study and religious instruction, through its many changes to the now inclusive area of religious education, embracing as it does all faiths and worldviews. Close collaboration with the Interfaith Network of the UK, with members of the Humanist Association, as well as with members of many faith groups in the UK has kept *Shap* at the heart of these developments. Alongside this is important work on the avoidance of doctrinaire and purely scriptural teaching, leading to the question of whether 'I' can teach the faith of another.

Shap has been active, via its members, in affecting the outcome of debates in the House of Commons on various new Education Acts and in the House of Lords on a



crucial debate where Lord Combermere and various others spoke favorably in support of openness.

Engagement in academic work has always been at the core of Shap activities. As mentioned above the Shap Journal contains over 650 articles, and university courses and initial teacher education courses for religious education have been affected by the work of Shap members. A significant proportion of professors of religious education have been involved with Shap's work or sat as Shap members and the work of these can be found at the core of religious education pedagogy – one only has to think of the work of Ninian Smart, Geoffrey Parrinder, Bob Jackson, John Hull, John Hinnells, Brian Gates and others to see this influence.

Shap's work has influenced changes to Locally Agreed Syllabuses of religious education and thus to the work of their National Association (NASACRE), just as its work on multi-faith religious education has influenced the development of the LAs as well as school curriculums.

It is hard to estimate the number of religious educators in both the university and the school sectors who have been engaged in professional development at one of the Shap Conferences. Over the years there have been 55 of these, offering quality professional development to teachers in the UK, and wider (in Istanbul, Egypt and Israel). A former chair of Shap, Lesley Prior is currently chair of the European Forum for Teachers of Religious Education (EFTRE) and the current co-chair, Paul Hopkins, is the ex-executive officer and president of the same.

As well as being influenced by this face-to-face professional development there cannot be a teacher of religious education whose shelves do not display a collection of Shap originated materials produced by members of the working party: influential handbooks for teachers and a wide range of thematic books and classroom material, academic texts, and those 650 articles from the journal, as well as 50 years of Calendar materials creatively developed in a range of formats. A significant number of schools around the country have a Shap festival calendar in their classroom. The Shap audio-glossary developed in 2013 was an innovative on-line resource to help teachers in the complex world of vocabulary for religious education.

Shap has also recognized the work of others in the religious education world with 16 Shap awards to a wide range of individuals and resource providers. Details can be seen in the document in this collection and on the website. As part of the Jubilee there will be presentations to three of the 'rising stars' of the RE world.



For all of this, at the heart of the Shap working party are its members. In the 50 years of its existence there have been over 100 members of the Working Party at all levels of education, each working with and valuing each other. There are currently 20 members and the ongoing calendar group will include a dozen of these. Extant members include such luminaries as Ninian Smart, Geoffrey Parrinder, John Hinnells, Owen W Cole, Alan Brown, John Rankin, Hugo Gryn, Elizabeth Wilson, Vida Barnett and many others. Existing members are not included in this list as yet, but are still there, just waiting till they die!

So, whilst it is sad that Shap will close it will do so with dignity and will be able to look back with pride at the rich heritage of activity that has taken place, at the truly magnificent resources it has produced and at its legacy which includes the range of religious education organizations, academics and teachers who have been influenced or formed by Shap and its members. A roll call of Shap includes, without doubt, the very best of religious education over the last 50 years. There is hardly a name in religious education that has not been involved in, or influenced by, the Shap working party, and any reference list in an assignment on religious education would contain more than a handful of 'Shappers'

So, thanks to all these wonderful contributors. Whilst the working party will close, the name of Shap and the legacy it leaves behind it will live on.

Paul Hopkins

Co-Chair and Treasurer