

1.4) Why bother? Why should we discuss sectarianism?



Introduction

This toolkit contains a wide range of resources and working examples that you can use to help you deliver anti-sectarian work.

Before starting to develop any piece of anti-sectarian work however, it is important you have an understanding of why we should be exploring the topic.

Why should we discuss sectarianism?

This section of the toolkit provides some background information to how the anti-sectarian agenda has developed, alongside evidence that may help you in justifying developing a piece of work exploring sectarianism with your own group.

What is sectarianism?

Firstly, before looking at the background context to the current anti-sectarian agenda, it is useful to explore *what is sectarianism?*

As a starting point it can be beneficial to look at how the dictionary describes sectarianism:

sectarian -

Adjective -

1. of, belonging or relating to, or characteristic of sects or sectaries
2. adhering to a particular sect, faction or doctrine
3. narrow-minded, esp as a result of rigid adherence to a particular sect

Noun -

4. a member of a sect or faction, esp one who is bigoted in his adherence to its doctrines or in his intolerance towards other sects, etc

COLLINS DICTIONARY

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In Scotland sectarianism most frequently refers to intra-Christian tensions between Protestants and Roman Catholics and the subsequent bigotry that can manifest from these tensions.

Sectarianism however, can also take place in other religions such as Islam, where tensions between different groups of Muslims (i.e. Sunni and Shia can also result in tension and subsequent bigotry.

It is important to remember that each community will experience sectarianism differently. The Leith anti-sectarianism Project for example found that much of their discussion on intra-Christian sectarianism was grounded in the past and tied up with multicultural issues in the present.

“ Sectarianism is very complicated. Sectarianism comes under different cultures as well.

There's a lot of different things that fall under sectarianism.

Just because you don't see it, doesn't mean it doesn't happen. It's like mental health, just because you don't see it, doesn't mean someone doesn't have it.'

Historically, not just with Christianity, people have used their religious beliefs to manipulate things for their own end. A classic example of this currently is in the Middle East.

Leith anti-sectarianism Project participants – definition of sectarianism

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As you can see from the above definitions, sectarianism in Leith was not strictly defined as intra-Christian. Much of this can be explained by the unique multicultural make up of Leith.

This issue is highlighted in a 2014 report commissioned by Manchester University and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. In this report the City of Edinburgh is rated to have the highest density rating, and a study of census data for the Leith ward shows that Leith is the most ethnically diverse area of Edinburgh.

Sectarianism has been particularly difficult to define and can be influenced by a multitude of factors. Through the recent work delivered as part of the Tackling Sectarianism Programme however, the Scottish Government now defines sectarianism as:

“Sectarianism in Scotland in Scotland is a mixture of perceptions, attitudes, actions, and structures that involves overlooking, excluding, discriminating against or being abusive or violent towards others on the basis of their perceived Christian denominational background. This perception is always mixed with other factors such as, but not confined to, politics, football allegiance and national identity”.

Background context

Why should we discuss sectarianism?

The road to the Scottish Government's current focus on challenging sectarianism was one that began prior to devolution and included many pivotal moments. For more information on the key events that influenced this, check out Duncan Morrow's – Learning from Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland:

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series5/morrow071015.pdf



Why should we discuss sectarianism?

The recent work of the Scottish Government in tackling intra-Christian sectarianism through the *Tackling Sectarianism Programme* has greatly helped to evidence and explain how intra-Christian sectarianism manifests itself in modern day Scotland.

Four lessons from the Tackling Sectarianism Programme are:

- 1. A comprehensive policy community: Successful public policy to address deep-rooted issues associated with violence, discrimination and social hostility requires active participation at the level of politics, civil society and public institutions. Action by any one of these elements alone is likely to be partial and undermined by the inaction of another element. Properly conceived, politics and civil society are essential partners not rivals in addressing the issue.**
- 2. Long term planning and action: Change in deep-rooted issues is necessarily slow and complex. The Scottish Advisory Group took 30 months to come to recommendations based on engagement and dialogue. This process of engagement itself created a new openness to consider a contentious and difficult issue and to create a community of interest for future implementation.**
- 3. Independent Assessment and Evidence Base: In a context of social contention, where emotion and**

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vested interest prevail, creating a shared and less emotive basis for engagement is critical. While politics must create the conditions for this and be seen to be open to change, the Scottish experience suggests that civil society, appointed for a limited time, may be better placed to explore and recommend change. Once sufficient consensus is established to enable progress, research evidence can provide a vital mechanism to build confidence that progress is based on addressing agreed problems rather than blame the partnership.

- 4. Social change: legislation and political leadership are necessary but insufficient instruments. The Scottish experience suggests that community engagement, the development of models of practice and the translation of those models into new mainstream actions are vital tools for changing inequalities issues. This requires a policy stance open to learning and pro-active willingness to translate this development into institutional practice. It remains to be seen whether long-term progress will require further legislative intervention. (Morrow, D. 2014: p6)**

We recommend that if you are looking for a detailed overview of the findings, you should check out the *Advisory Group on ‘Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland and its consequences in Scotland’ Final Report of Advisory Group on Tackling Sectarianism:*

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<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00477619.pdf>

A copy of this report is also included in physical handling box of this toolkit.

For more background information on how this programme was subsequently developed please also check out:

http://www.voluntaryactionfund.org.uk/files/5413/8927/4832/no_place_for_sectarianism.pdf

This guide is also particularly useful if you are looking to evidence the impact of your anti-sectarian project. For additional information about evaluating your work, please see section 6.) *Evaluating your anti-sectarianism project* of this guide.

Moving forward

It appears that moving forward, how our government approaches tackling intra-Christian sectarianism may change. One indicator as to how this may take shape can be found in the document: *What Works to Reduce Prejudice? A Review of the Evidence Report* (see section 1.6)

In October 2015 this piece of research was commissioned by the Scottish Government at a summit hosted by Paul Wheelhouse, the Minister for Community Safety and Legal Affairs in order to review the evidence on activities and interventions that have been used previously to reduce prejudice.

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Key points from the document include:

- **There are two main theories of prejudice reduction - ‘Contact’ where exposure to others reduces prejudice itself and ‘education’ where information about other groups provides a challenge to negative attitudes;**
- **Sustained activities have more impact than short-term interventions; and**
- **Overly dramatic and factually incorrect interpretations of prejudice for the purpose of ‘hard hitting’ messages could risk alienating sections of the audience**

References

Morrow, D.(2015):Ulster University Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series Learning from Tackling Sectarianism in Scotland.

http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series5/morrow071015.pdf

Simpson, L.(2014):Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity(code) The University of Manchester M13 9PL, UK.

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<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00477619.pdf>

