



Welcome to the Newsletter 2009!

Inside we review the September conference and give news of how ISRSA is promoting RS in independent schools.

We need your responses to this Newsletter and to questions asked within it so that we can improve our functioning and so that you can play your part, advertise your events or alert us to new opportunities.

Read on!

We were delighted with the response at this year's conference in King's College, Cambridge. However, we are never content and so invite you to give us your suggestions for next year — venue, date, speakers/ seminars, theme, food. Whilst we cannot hope to please everyone, we are aiming for a varied, high-quality and practical range of activities.

Send your suggestions to the address at the foot of this page now!

Did you enjoy King's College Cambridge?

Here are some of the comments:

Everybody I spoke to, and I expect I spoke to a considerable majority, said how much they appreciated the new location and how much they enjoyed the day
[Ian Lowry];

I really enjoyed this year's conference. Being a teacher in a prep school, it is not often that my brain and my intellect are stretched and challenged as they were that morning by Alistair McGrath. It was good to take time out and to be able to take in, for once, and be inspired by such a great scholar before returning to the humdrum of school life, knowing that we are all part of something so much bigger.
[Isabelle McGarahan]

Most spoke well of the venue, a big change from Chelsea though some thought harder to reach.

What do you think?

- Stay there in 2010?
- Move to another venue, say, in Oxford?

Secondly, suggestions please on:

- What form the conference should have in 2010.
- Which speakers you can recommend.

Alistair McGrath's Keynote Lecture

Professor McGrath spoke on how Christianity presents a big picture of the world, a 'lens for viewing the world', the means by which we see the whole of life. This presents us with the challenge of how faith can demonstrate a sound rationale which can take on the 'new atheism', new in the sense that its books, rather than its ideas, are new.

McGrath embraces Critical Realism, the acceptance of the value of reason in addressing the world around us, denying post-modern anti-realism and recognising that all theories of how the world works, including atheist ones, must make sense of the world we all know. In this respect he reviewed the atheism of Richard Dawkins and others (Dennett, Hichern, Harris), lifting its veil of 'neutrality', showing that its assumptions of religion's irrationality and irrelevance become also its conclusions by sleight of hand. He cited several authors in support of his case that the Dawkins paradigm for religion should be rejected.

McGrath is Chair of Theology, Ministry and Education at King's College London, and has a vigorous commitment to Natural Theology, which is complementary to his Critical Realism. Christianity is, for him, a justified belief and can be defended, it is the 'inference to best explanation' of why the world is how it is. McGrath rejected John Hick's pluralism, on the ground that it itself is a claim to knowing the truth, which Hick denies is possible; he advocated the work of Andy Wright at King's [an ISRSA patron] and Karen Armstrong's intricate work in *The Case for God*.

Questions at the end focussed on the new Atheism, on the value of Mysticism as evidence, and on the prior commitments we all bring to our studies. Professor McGrath responded to these with typical clarity yet profundity to conclude a masterful and much appreciated keynote address.



Medical Ethics

Michael Wilcockson's first seminar was on Medical Ethics, about which he is a noted A Level author. Using a novel approach for A Level, he considered deductive and inductive reasoning and some of the common fallacies incurred in these arguments; this led on to a consideration of how to use them in the context of medical ethics. Thus, forming syllogistic deductive arguments can be a way of getting students to think carefully about what are the major and minor premises in medical ethical arguments and whether these can sustain some of the commonly-held conclusions. The seminar, well-attended and disarmingly straightforwardly presented, was much appreciated.



Feature Article: The IB Middle Years' Programme

Wellington College have chosen to offer the Middle Years Programme of the International Baccalaureate as opposed to GCSEs for Years 9-11. RS/Philosophy becomes part of the Humanities group in the 8-part 'diploma' which also incorporates an interdisciplinary project and community/service activity. Wellington is the first British Independent school to offer the programme and joins 700 other schools worldwide.

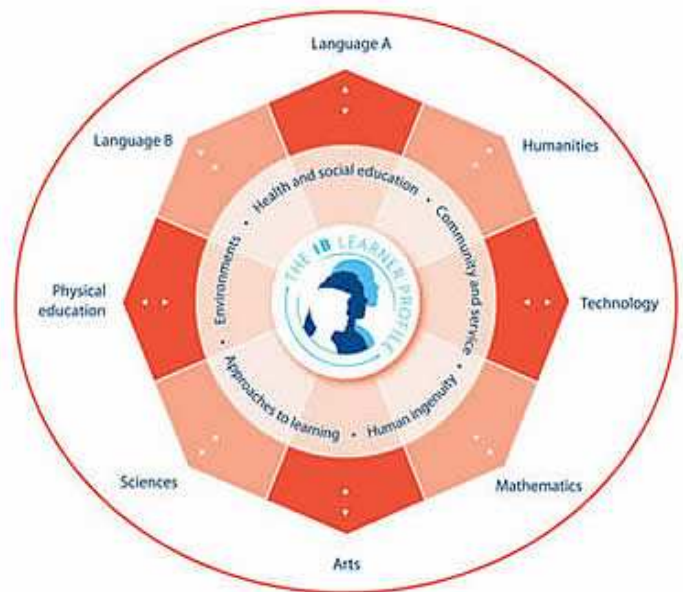
The move to join the MYP has been hugely beneficial to all, notably for us in the Philosophy and Religion Department. We have designed a course totally in house (ratified by the IB) which we know appeals to us as teachers but most importantly to the students as learners. Personal Identity, Great Theological/Philosophical Minds, Israelis and Palestinians, Building a Perfect World and Spirituality are just a few of the courses. It also enables us to work constructively with our Humanities colleagues in History and Geography. We are firmly on the map and making excellent progress. Although there are some tricky assessment procedures and quite a lot of paperwork, these pale in comparison to the utterly liberating and fascinating developments inside and outside the classroom for students.

Not having to tick boxes for a final exam feels wonderful. Learning comes first. We have had total support from all universities, parents and leaders in industry. The future looks very bright for our students who will have an MYP certificate under their belts.

If anyone has any questions, they are more than welcome to contact me at

jat@wellingtoncollege.org.uk.

James Thomas, Head of Philosophy and Religion at Wellington College



Science and Religion in Schools

Martin Rogers presented a detailed seminar on the work of the organisation, supported through part of this by Paul Hopkins [<http://www.mmiweb.org.uk/>]. Martin brought with him a number of copies of the excellent science and religion in schools teacher's books for primary and secondary level education and it may be best at this point to refer you to their website for guidance: <http://www.srsp.net>. Resources there are downloadable and you can order the book and accompanying CD with a huge quantity of lesson plans, guidance and work sheets. We were grateful to Martin for the seminar he presented and fully persuaded of the value of the srsp's work!

Paul Hopkins ran his own seminar on **webquests and podcasts**, a fascinating insight into the ever expanding world of e-learning. See his website for more details.

Wonders of the World and Early Years—Lesley Pollard

The popular seminars from previous years were repeated, or at least re-visited and developed for a keen audience. Although Early Years tended to deal with very early years, the quality of activities and practical applications of the ideas and suggestions she made had us all busy and engaged — children again! Wonders of the World explored the beauties of nature as signs of creation and of the beautiful world in which we find ourselves: sadly, Northamptonshire LEA will not release these for us to use.

Environmental Ethics. Mark Dowd (*Operation Noah*)

In his seminar, Mark Dowd challenged both the way we think about the environment and how we approach Environmental issues in the class room:

If one imagines a 'control room' for our planet, many warning lights would now be flashing. These include: **landfill sites** reaching their limits. Taiwan and Korea, for instance, have banned food waste from landfill. **Over fishing.** Up to 40% of fish stocks face extinction by 2050, See 'The End of the Line' by Charles Clover, Environmental Editor, Daily Telegraph. **Greenhouse gases** (which cause Climate Change) in the atmosphere are now 30% higher than before the Industrial Revolution.

In December 2009 almost 200 of the world's leaders will gather in Copenhagen for one of the most significant meetings of our time, to decide on a successor to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol.

The first conference of environmental ethics was in 1971; only in the last 40 years have we approached the limits of our planet's capacity. Those with vested interests often dismiss the problem as irrelevant, citing evidence, for instance, that CO₂ levels have historically been much higher without adverse effects, but the scientific community now fully accepts the climate crisis, and the urgent need to respond to it.

It may also force a major reconsideration of two cornerstones of our modern libertarian world. First, that Nation States are sovereign within their own boundaries. If greenhouse gases respected national boundaries, the massive inequity dilemmas which will dominate the Copenhagen summit would largely disappear. As it is, those states which have done least to set in train global warming are most at risk from sea level rise, floods, droughts and food shortages. Secondly we may need to re-evaluate our ideas of personal freedom. JS Mill suggested that freedom is 'an absence of restraint', but absence of restraint on my energy consumption is not without cost to my neighbours throughout the world. One might compare the morality of climate change with that of smoking. Not restraining individuals from damaging themselves by smoking carries a price to others in terms of harmful passive smoking and medical costs to society. Those in the tobacco industry were among the last to recognise it openly.

China is often sited as producing 29% of the planet's emissions, but her industrialisation is relatively recent, and historically she has contributed only about 6% to the rise in CO₂ levels. China also makes large quantities of consumer goods for the West, who by exporting their emissions elsewhere can claim significant reductions at home.

We need to recognise the very close interdependence of every part of the natural world. To give one example, a recent decline in bee numbers means that pollination of plants, and possibly our own food production, is affected. Justice requires that the voice of the poor is heard (eg: Hosea, Amos). Nothing short of a huge change in human behaviour can combat Climate Change. As Donne well said, 'No man is an island'.



The Religions' Panel

The afternoon faiths forum was represented by members of the Christian, Hindu and Muslim traditions – it being Yom Kippur, no Jewish representative was available. The panel considered a wide range of issues posed by the chairman and by members of the audience. We began by considering the main challenges to faith in the UK today, Answers to this varied - for the Hindus it is the need to offer faith within the scientific paradigm, for Christians it is the problem of creeping secularisation and marginalisation of the Church; for Muslims it is the challenge to educate them in a broader and more inclusive version of Islam. Further discussion touched on whether religious education at school should be multi-faith, the involvement of humanism in religious studies programmes and whether some religions should not be taught at school.

Stimulating and authentic, this new seminar was of great benefit for all those present.

Schemes of Work and Assessment for Common Entrance - Susan Grenfell

Schemes of work form the highway from the syllabus to the lesson. They provide a properly thought-out framework, prevent missing important parts of the syllabus by accident, impose time restraints and they enable us to teach to both our pupils' and our own strengths. Medium term plans should be constructed under broadly four or five headings: time frame or date; learning objectives; lesson content or activities; resources, although these can be included within the text of the lesson content; assessment criteria. This last heading has replaced 'learning outcomes' and is the latest buzz word. It involves setting out criteria by which we may judge whether our pupils have achieved the learning objectives and it informs how we proceed with subsequent lessons.

It is very important that we enjoy the syllabus; it is a good syllabus and there is plenty of variety in the way we can approach each topic. As teachers, we should be teaching in the way we get the most out of it. If we are fulfilled, our pupils will reap the benefits. Enthusiasm for the subject is what attracts our students.

There are two main approaches to tackling a scheme of work: firstly, the unit based scheme whereby we work our way through a series of units and teach each unit as entire in itself. The advantage of this approach is that it is methodical and students can experience a sense of closure at the completion of every unit. It can be learned thoroughly and ticked off the list.

The second approach is the thematic one where the starting point is a theme such as justice or sacrifice in sections one and two, and festivals or main beliefs in section three. The theme can be explored through a number of different units. The advantage of this method is that students can see the links between units and transfer ideas more easily.

Assessment is not always easy to get right but Michael Wilcockson's book 'Preparing for Common Entrance Religious Studies', makes it possible. It not only sets out and explains the level descriptors, but it also contains a number of useful suggestions for ways our pupils can improve their marks. Potential level raisers are as follows: Explain key words such as Pharisee, refer to the historical and religious background of a story to help explain a point, use technical words such as discipleship and refer to another Bible passage to show how a theme is continued. The use of contemporary examples is crucial in any answer and we need to be strict about this from the beginning.

The challenge is managing to award a level that will not destroy confidence but nor will it give an unrealistic sense of ability. The use of progress charts at two stages: 1st year and 2nd year Common Entrance, helps give students a sense of progression and achievement. Level descriptors set out on the charts pitched to the two stages, remind them what is required. Although schools use the same guidance for levels, they vary in their expectations. Getting to know the Heads of Department in the schools to which we send our pupils is one way of finding out what they are looking for so that we can pitch our levels more accurately.

The new Council, as elected at the Conference, comprises:

Richard Coupe <i>Chairman</i>	Berkhamsted
Susan Grenfell <i>Secretary</i>	St Hugh's Prep
Neil Stannard <i>Treasurer</i>	Kingham Hill
John Caperon	Bloxham Project
Martin Goff	King's Chester
Michael Wilcockson	Eton
Ian Lowry	Sussex House
Isabelle McGarahan	Thomas's, Battersea
Julian Holland	Framlingham
Tom Hibberd	Whitgift

Patrons/Advisors

Professor Terence Copley	Oxford University
Professor Andrew Wright	King's London
Dr Eleanor Nesbit	Warwick University
Professor Philip Esler	St Andrew's University
Professor Keith Ward	Oxford University
John Keast	
Dick Powell	
Gill Badham	Administrator