

personal level the ABS would offer a welcome and encouragement.

Existing non-Bahá'í academics/scholars working in the Bahá'í Faith or Bahá'í perspectives

The ABS would provide these with the opportunity to gather accurate information on the Bahá'í Faith and Bahá'í community, as well as feedback and encouragement on their work.

Bahá'í Institutions

Ideally, the ABS would provide Bahá'í Institutions at various levels with the opportunity to explore new ideas and perspectives, provide a venue for commissioning stance papers/fact sheets/research documents, and offer the possibility of spotting a new pool of Bahá'í speakers.

Potential Bahá'í academics/scholars

The ABS should provide the wider Bahá'í community with an opportunity to explore different ways of thinking, inspire deeper reflection and new perspectives, and encourage them to delve into study of the Bahá'í Faith, its Writings and its application to other fields of endeavour. It would also instill in the Bahá'í community a reassurance that scholarship is a legitimate arena of service.

ABS(ESE) - A Retrospective

1. Publications

a) *The Bahá'í Studies Review*

Over the last few years, the Bahá'í Studies Review (BSR) has established itself as the leading Bahá'í studies periodical. Its founding editor was Seena Fazel in 1991. John Danesh and Seena Fazel coedited the BSR from 1994-2002 (ending with BSR 10), and, in 2003, Moojan Momen was appointed editor. Editorship has been non-stipendiary.

The BSR moved Bahá'í studies forward in a number of ways. Firstly, it commissioned and worked with new talent in Bahá'í studies; a large number of its contributors published for the first time in the BSR. Secondly, it focused on foundational issues in Bahá'í studies, and published groundbreaking material on interpretation, theology, ethics, spirituality, apologetics, and history. Thirdly, the BSR was the first Bahá'í studies journal to publish reflective essays ("Soundings"), review articles of Bahá'í secondary literature, extended obituaries of prominent Bahá'í intellectuals and artists (starting with Marzieh Gail in BSR 6), and previously unpublished compilations of Bahá'í writings. It published bibliographic guides to Bahá'í literature (BSR 8 and 11) and provisional translations of Bahá'í scripture (BSR 9 onwards). Fourthly, BSR commissioned renowned thinkers inside and outside the Bahá'í community to write invited commentaries, which included two pieces by a

leading philosopher of religion: John Hick (BSR 4 and 10). Fifthly, it published all back issues online and remains the only Bahá'í studies periodical to have done so.

The impact of BSR can be seen in many ways. A number of BSR articles have been reprinted, including in ABS publications in North America and Australia. Articles have been translated and published in Dutch, Polish and Persian. The BSR has been indexed in Religion Index and Index Islamicus, the most important academic bibliographic indexes in their respective fields, since 1993. Citation analysis, the most widely used method in academia to measure journal impact, has demonstrated that the BSR is the most cited Bahá'í studies periodical, a finding that reached statistical significance (see the recent paper "*Contemporary Developments in Bahá'í Studies*" at <http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/bhpapers/vol7/trends.htm>). Reference works, such as *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith* (Oneworld, 2001) and the *Curriculum Guide for the Scholarly Study of the Bahá'í Faith* (NSA of the Bahá'ís of America, 1998), cite more articles from the BSR than from other journals. The BSR remains heavily used as an Internet resource and articles from it are amongst the most downloaded from the Bahá'í Library website (bahai-library.org). On the difficult issue of what constitutes Bahá'í studies, the special issue on "*Challenges and Prospects of Bahá'í Scholarship*" (BSR 3.2) remains a valuable source of basic materials.

The comments of Bahá'ís interested in developing the intellectual life of the community represent another measure of the BSR's excellent reputation. The editors have received much positive feedback about past issues. For example, unsolicited comments about the last issue (BSR 10) include:

"Excellent and most interesting... the surveys on methodology were very good and complemented one another," Ian Semple, member of the Universal House of Justice

"The inside is pure gold," Dr Robert Stockman, Director, Research Office, National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the USA

"A magnificent issue... will be referred to for decades to come," Tony Lee, Managing Editor, Kalimat Press

"An excellent issue, highly interesting," Dr Udo Schaefer, Baha'i author and scholar

"Brilliant," Professor Franklin Lewis, Emory University

"A triumph," Professor Christopher Buck, Michigan State University.

A selection of papers from the first decade of the BSR was recently reprinted by Kalimat Press in their *Studies in Bábí and Bahá'í Religions* series, under the title "*Reason and Revelation: New Directions in Bahá'í Thought*" (Kalimat, 2002).

Among those who have been involved in the publication of the BSR over the years, is Chris Manvell, who continues to typeset, as he has done over the past nine issues, and without any charge. Over 30 individuals have acted as anonymous peer reviewers.

b) Associate

The newsletter of the ABS(ESE), *Associate*, has published 37 issues. It has been a useful resource for individuals to keep abreast of current developments in Bahá'í studies. For example, it has reported Bahá'í participation at the American Academy of Religion, the Middle Eastern Studies Association, and other non-Bahá'í conferences. *Associate* also reported on the Irfan Colloquia, ABS conferences around the world, and other relevant activities. It provided a more complete listing of such reports than other ABS newsletters or the abbreviated descriptions of Bahá'í scholarship activities in Bahá'í yearbooks. In addition, *Associate* published short papers on a number of subjects, including Bahá'í history in Poland and Australia, human rights, the development of Bahá'í studies, and gender issues. Issue 33/34 included articles by Muhammad Afnan, William Collins, Moojan Momen, Wendi Momen, and Robert Stockman on aspects of Bahá'í studies. It printed occasional bibliographic updates, and short summaries of articles on the Bábí-Bahá'í Faiths that appeared in non-Bahá'í periodicals.

Associate has been produced by several people over the years: Seena Fazel, Iarfhlaith Watson and latterly Jane Aldred.

c) Other Publications

The ABS(ESE) has published three editions of an online journal, "Solas", being the proceedings of annual conferences held in the Republic of Ireland. These date from 2000 and are edited by Iarfhlaith Watson.

A selection of papers from conferences held by the Special Interest Group on Politics and International Law (BIPOLIG) was published under the title "*Processes of the Lesser Peace*" (George Ronald, 2003).

The ABS(ESE) in conjunction with the European Bahá'í Youth Council, published two editions of "*The Bahá'í Student Handbook*", a resource for Bahá'í activities at universities and colleges. Although all copies of this handbook have been distributed, it remains online at the ABS(ESE) website and is mirrored on other websites.

2. Conferences

The ABS(ESE) has convened many conferences over the last decade. Annual conferences have been a regular feature of the Association and have provided opportunities to hear presentations on a range of subjects of broad interest to the Bahá'í community. Themes for the conference have included "*Shoghi Effendi in Oxford*", during which a tour of sites associated with Shoghi Effendi's education at Oxford was offered, and also memorable presentations from

individuals who had met the Guardian such as Philip Hainsworth. Recent conferences have been on the theme of "*Fundamentalism*", with thoughtful presentations by Professor Sholeh Quinn, Dr Moojan Momen, and others. Other conferences have discussed "*Growth Trends in the Bahá'í Community*" with an overview of Bahá'í writings by Shahriar Razavi and a review of the sociological and psychological research on conversions to the Faith by Seena Fazel – reflecting the view of the ABS(ESE) that "teaching" and Bahá'í scholarship are closely interrelated. Conference themes have also included social issues, such as development economics, education, and gender issues. Annual conferences have also been held in the Republic of Ireland. Regional conferences have been held in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Special sessions of the Irish summer school have been organized by the ABS(ESE), starting with a seminar on moral development in 1999 that was run by Masoud Afnan.

3. Special Interest Groups (SIGs)

The outstanding Religious Studies SIG has continued under the direction of Stephen Lambden and Moojan Momen. This special interest group built on work of the Bahá'í Studies Seminar, formed in the 1970s. The Seminar accepted the invitation of the ABS(ESE) to become a SIG in 1992. This SIG currently meets biannually, and has attracted Bahá'í scholars from around the world including Todd Lawson, John Walbridge, Robert Stockman, Udo Schaefer, Nicola Towfigh, Sholeh Quinn, Will van den Hoonaard, and Peter Smith.

The other SIG that met regularly, in the mid-late 1990s, and has recently been re-activated, was one on International Law and Politics (BIPOLIG) that was coordinated by Naz Ghanea-Hercock and Babak Bahador. BIPOLIG held a number of large conferences at the LSE with international speakers such as Arthur Dahl, Charles Lerche, Augusto Lopez-Claros, and experts working in the UK such as Geeta Gandhi Kingdon, Dan Sarooshi, and Michael Richards.

Other SIGs include gender studies, science and religion, education, and sociology but their work has not yet been sustained. This remains a problem for the ABS(ESE) – that the human resources in the Bahá'í community make it a challenge to maintain SIGs beyond the initial enthusiasm that surrounds their formation.

4. Training

A number of training weekends were held by the ABS(ESE) aimed at developing skills for research for young Bahá'ís. The first was jointly run by Seena Fazel and Shahriar Razavi in Swindon in 1995, and attracted 10 young Bahá'ís – a number of whom have subsequently made important contributions to Bahá'í studies. Two weekend training seminars were held in the Republic of Ireland, the first in Dublin in 1997 and the second in Ennis in 1998. A scholarship weekend was held in Stockholm at the request of the Swedish National Youth Committee in 2000. Seena Fazel ran

these three seminars. Talks at summer schools in England and Ireland were given on the importance of Bahá'í studies. The Religious Studies SIG has held one-day introductory seminars in Bahá'í studies run by Stephen Lambden and Moojan Momen for many years.

An important initiative of the ABS(ESE), after consultation with the Continental Board of Counsellors, was to run a training course for youth in Bahá'í studies. The first of these was organized jointly by Jane Aldred and Seena Fazel, and held during the Arts Academy at Sidcot in 2001, and called the Bahá'í Scholarship Academy. It included lectures by Lil Abdo, Dominic Brookshaw, Seena Fazel, Stephen Lambden, Moojan Momen, Wendi Momen, and Sholeh Quinn. In 2002, it was held at the Irish summer school at Waterford, and speakers included Amin Banani, Sheila Banani, Stephen Lambden, Todd Lawson, Sholeh Quinn and Iarfhlaith Watson. The ABS(ESE) also organized a weekend study course on the Covenant in Dublin run by Todd Lawson in 2001.

5. Bahá'í Societies

The ABS(ESE) administered the running of Bahá'í Societies from 1992. Initially it appointed a sub-committee and subsequently a taskforce. Annual Bahá'í Society conferences were held in the early 1990s with large attendances, and latterly Bahá'í Society sessions have been held during part of the ABS(ESE) annual conference. The ABS(ESE) worked with this sub-committee to publish the Bahá'í Student Handbook, and corresponded on behalf of the sub-committee with the House of Justice over the development of its own constitution. This led to important changes in the constitution that meant that Bahá'í Societies could be formed in some universities. Bahá'í Societies events have been reported regularly in the Associate, which acted as a vehicle for sharing ideas and best practice.

The NSA decided in June 2003 to de-centralise responsibility for Bahá'í Societies to the Councils, and it is to these that requests for guidance and information should now be directed (see elsewhere in this newsletter).

6. Collaborations

The ABS(ESE) has met with representatives of the Learned Arm on three occasions, including a training day where committee members deepened on aspects of the guidance from the Universal House of Justice on Bahá'í scholarship. The ABS(ESE) also has met with liaison members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the UK (Wendi Momen) and Republic of Ireland (Seosamh Watson) on a regular basis. Members of the ABS(ESE) Executive Committee met with the UK NSA at a national conference in Manchester in 1995, and a representative of the executive committee met with the Irish NSA in 1996. Both NSAs have funded activities of the ABS(ESE) when requested, although the ABS(ESE) has been self-financing for 9 of the last 12 years.

Collaborations with other ABS's have been less developed, although members of the Committee have attended ABS activities in Australia, North America, India, and Germany. Although the ABS was first started in Canada, affiliate ABS's remain relatively autonomous and are under the administrative auspices of their respective National Spiritual Assemblies.

7. Website

Through the excellent work of Chris Manvell, the ABS(ESE) has a website that includes all past issues of the BSR, recent issues of *Associate*, copies of *Solas*, and the *Bahá'í Student Handbook*. Also a facility was set up to pay membership and purchase back issues of the BSR online. The website includes news and information about upcoming ABS(ESE) events. It is at www.bahai.org.uk/abs/

National Assembly Transfers Institutional Responsibility for University/College Bahá'í Societies to The Councils

Extracts and digest from a letter by the National Spiritual Assembly to all four Bahá'í Councils in the United Kingdom (July 2003).

The National Spiritual Assembly strongly believes that the societies continue to have a range of extremely valuable roles. Such roles include:

- Focusing and developing the three core activities of the Plan
- Proclaiming the Faith to the university and college populations - which are viewed as potentially receptive populations by the National Assembly
- Encouraging Bahá'í scholarship
- Pastoral care activities
- External affairs activities.

The constitution of Bahá'í Societies was clearly defined by the Universal House of Justice more than twenty years ago.

“The major responsibilities that the Councils will now have in relation to Bahá'í Societies are as follows:

- Encouraging Bahá'í students at universities and colleges to form Bahá'í Societies whenever feasible
- Helping Bahá'í students to recognize the importance of developing the activities detailed above on a regular basis (especially the core activities of the Plan)