

Churchgoing teenagers biggest backers of Muslim identity in Britain

July 26 2011

New research released today from the University of Warwick's Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit demonstrates that churchgoing young Christians give much more support to their Muslim peers, in comparison with young people who have no religious faith.

The survey was led by University of Warwick researcher Professor Leslie J Francis, Jennifer Croft, Alice Pyke and Mandy Robbins and involves 10,000 13- to 15-year-old pupils, 2,000 each from England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and London. The results, looking at responses from the first 3000 of those young people, were presented, today Tuesday 26th July, at a conference at the University of Warwick is organised as part of the AHRC/ESRC Religion & Society Program.

The three key questions demonstrating that churchgoing young Christians give much more support to their Muslim peers in comparison with young people who have no religious faith gave the following results

Muslims should be allowed to wear the headscarf in schools:

- no religion 60 %
- nominal Christian 59 %
- practising Christian 79 %

Muslims should be allowed to wear the Burka in schools:

- no religion 51 %
- nominal Christian 52 %
- practising Christian 63 %

I am in favour of Muslim schools:

- no religion 18 %
- nominal Christian 23 %
- practising Christian 29 %

Professor Robert Jackson, Director of the University of Warwick's Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit. said: "This new research shows that the difficulties in Britain over religious diversity are caused less by conflicts between religions and more by the hostility to religions shown by some young people who have no religious identity of their own. Young people who practise a faith have the opportunity to learn about their own faith and about people of other faiths."

"The place of Religious Education in schools offers a crucial opportunity for those young people who have no faith of their own to learn what religious faith means for young Muslims and young members of other faiths. If we stop investing in religious education we are fuelling religious discrimination and religious hostility into the future."

University of Warwick researcher Professor Leslie Francis said: "This survey has really given voice to the views of young people from across Britain into their experience of living in a culture that increasingly reflects religious diversity. Young people from different religious backgrounds clearly show respect for each other. But the challenge

facing schools today is to enable those young people who do not come from a religious background themselves to gain insight into how their peers from religious homes feel about things.”

“It is those outward signs of faith like the headscarf or the Burka that really focus the issues. It is not acceptable that young people should grow up in Britain today without knowing about religious traditions and without showing respect for religious differences. It is unacceptable that young people should be bullied in schools because they take their religious faith seriously. Never has there been a more important time for the Government to invest in high quality Religious Education throughout the school system.”

Provided by University of Warwick

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