



Peacebuilders return to Catz

Monday 24 July 2023

St Catharine's experienced conferencing team hosts a wide range of external meetings and residential conferences, and we are proud that so many event organisers choose to return to St Catharine's. Among the events hosted by the College this summer, the EXCEL (Exploring Conflict, Education, and Leadership) Institute chose to return for the third time for its residential workshop that brings together Jewish and Arab educators from Israel with their British counterparts.

Organised by Jerusalem Peacebuilders in partnership with Retorika for Multiculturalism, the EXCEL Institute's intensive programme aims to increase educators' capacities to integrate the practices of peacebuilding and youth leadership in their classrooms and curricula through a combination of experiential and hands-on sessions suitable to adaptation for high school classrooms.

St Catharine's originally hosted the EXCEL Institute workshop back in 2019 – for the programme's first ever cohort of educators, who all teach English



language lessons – thanks to connections nurtured by Dr Peter Wothers (1988, Natural Sciences; Fellow 1997). We were **pleased to report in July 2022 that a second cohort of educators had met at St Catharine's.**

Now that the EXCEL Institute's workshop has returned for a third time (3–9 July 2023), we took the opportunity to catch up with the organisers and participants about their experiences and the benefits of holding the event at St Catharine's.

Reflections from the organisers

The Rev. Canon Nicholas Porter, founding director of Jerusalem Peacebuilders and co-director of the EXCEL programme, commented:

“These Israeli Jewish and Palestinian Arab educators, what they have created together, and how they will connect their students' relationships are the engines of positive change. In such a deeply divided land, renewing human connection and creating a better future through education is a powerful way forward.”

Dr Elias Farah, co-director of the programme, was particularly struck by the openness of the participants and the progress they were able to make together:

“This year, we welcomed 17 teachers for the workshop and found that St Catharine's remains the perfect neutral



location for nurturing open dialogue. The participants engaged in intensive peacebuilding dialogue and conflict resolution, which led to tense and emotional moments as they discussed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Despite these tense moments, the participants were able to deepen their friendship and devoted time to planning meetings for their students in the forthcoming school year.

“Our time spent with British teachers continues to be a highlight of the workshop. This year’s session was kindly facilitated by the UK charity Solutions Not Sides and Cambridge’s Woolf Institute. We know from previous years that these additional connections are valuable – our 2022 participants have already organised online events between UK and Israeli classrooms, with face-to-face activities due to happen very soon.

“2023 was the first time that our workshop included a creative writing session, which involved published authors from Cambridge and lecturers from the University of Cambridge. Other highlights were a fantastic dinner catered for by St Catharine’s in the historic Senior Combination Room, punting on the river, and walking together to Grantchester where participants read poems in their own languages over a traditional English



tea and discussed the importance of language in our identities.”

Reflections from the participants

An Arab Israeli educator said, “Meeting in such a welcoming place as St Catharine’s was very conducive to creating a relaxed atmosphere that encourages an open and honest dialogue about the conflict, especially when discussing sensitive issues. It’s definitely the right place to meet and I consider myself fortunate to have had the chance to just be there and enjoy the environment.”

A Jewish Israeli participant added, “The week at St Catharine’s was the culmination of a year-long peacebuilding journey. In the beautiful setting of Cambridge, a neutral environment far from home, we deepened our connection to one another while enjoying adventures together. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that left me, personally, even more committed to the creation of a shared society for Jews and Arabs in Israel.”

What’s next?

Dr Farah commented, “Our programme is growing each year and we now have a long waiting list, even though we are expanding the number of participants. In

the coming days, 34 new teachers will embark on the early phases of the EXCEL Institute programme in Jerusalem – twice as many as previous years. They are due to complete the workshop at St Catharine in July 2024. By 2024, it is anticipated that the programme will have impacted about 10,000 students by engaging with their teachers.”



Attendees and organisers from the 2023 EXCEL Institute residential workshop at St Catharine's

News

Events



26.07.23 →

Catz researchers recognised by the British Academy

09.09.23 →
College Open Day

09.09.23 →
Members' Reunion Dinner

15.09.23 →
University Open Day

15.09.23