



# FAQs

**Professor Audrey Osler**  
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

## **Where did you grow up?**

I was born near London. My mother grew up in Singapore and my maternal grandparents come from Chennai in south India. My father's family are from England.

I was recently at a conference in Delhi for the first time and went to Agra to visit the Taj Mahal, which is a beautiful example of Islamic architecture. It did inspire me to go back and explore the south of India next time, which has a very different history and culture from the north.

## **You're a Leeds graduate aren't you?**

Yes, I came here because the history programme really appealed to me. It was an exciting time to be at university in the 70s and there was a lot of political engagement. We weren't part of the 60s revolution, but we felt the benefits of it.

## **Have you always been an academic?**

I began my career as a teacher, became an adviser on multicultural education, and then ran a teachers' centre. I've also been a consultant for organisations like Unesco and the Council of Europe. Becoming a university lecturer in Birmingham was a second career. I arrived at Leeds in 2004, and was a visiting scholar at the University of Washington in Seattle in 2007.

For three years I was diversity adviser to the Royal Air Force; they were trying to open up the armed forces to a wider range of people by addressing issues such as homophobia.

## **You're the founding director of the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights Education. Tell me more.**

It's an interdisciplinary centre in the School of Education, working with colleagues from politics and international studies, sociology

and social policy, which really attracted me to the job.

A few years ago we set up a master's course, 'Education and democracy', looking at education policies and children's human rights within a broad international perspective.

## **What kind of research do you carry out?**

At the moment I'm looking at what it means to be a European citizen, and together with our partners we've been surveying thousands of young people and their teachers in Britain, Germany, Austria, Estonia, Switzerland and the Netherlands. We're still interpreting the data but it's revealed a lot of resistance to the EU among young people in Britain, with some 'us and them' attitudes.

## **How much of a concern is that?**

One of the biggest challenges is learning to live together. The current financial crisis confirms that countries within the EU – and internationally – are very interdependent, so it's important that young people understand what we have in common with each other. I think young people are genuinely interested in the world around them, but they may not be well informed about how political decisions are reached at the European level.

## **What other kinds of activities do you get involved in?**

Earlier this year I was invited to Parliament as the main academic speaker to mark 10 years since citizenship was introduced into the school curriculum, which was quite an honour. I also gave evidence to a select committee on faith schools.

## **What's your proudest achievement?**

Last summer I was speaking at the United Nations University in Hokkaido, Japan. Afterwards I joined a group of super-fit Americans hiking through the wilderness in three national parks, including Daisetsuzan, 'the roof of Hokkaido'.

It was amazing to walk the rim of active volcanoes, although scary at times, and there were bear warnings everywhere! It was very physically demanding to say the least; we were climbing about 4,000 feet in four hours. After all that walking my knees hardly functioned when I got back to the UK, but it was an incredible experience.

## **Is that the hardest thing you've ever done?**

I went to Aceh, Indonesia, shortly after the Boxing Day tsunami in 2004 to help identify the community's educational needs following such a major disaster. It's now recognised that providing children with education during an emergency is just as important as food, water and shelter. Kids can easily go missing in those circumstances, and schooling can give them some degree of stability and security.

## **Who do you most admire and why?**

I'd probably choose Nelson Mandela. I heard him speak at the first 46664 rock concert in Cape Town to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS. It takes tremendous courage and vision to imagine a new future and live alongside people who were your political enemies.

## **What's your most frequently asked question?**

What is your carbon footprint? I do try to balance things out by using public transport to travel to work.

Audrey Osler was talking to Ruth Taylor.