

# Religion and belief in higher education: the experiences of staff and students



Equality Challenge Unit

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- = GuildHE
- = Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network
- = Hindu Forum of Britain
- = Inter Faith Network for the UK
- = National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies
- = National Hindu Students Forum
- = National Union of Students
- = Network of Buddhist Organisations (UK)
- = Student Christian Movement
- = Three Faiths Forum
- = UK Council for International Student Affairs
- = Union of Jewish Students
- = Universities UK
- = University and College Union
- = Young Jains

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## Executive summary

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Whether the ethos of an individual higher education institution (HEI) is self-consciously secular or based on a religious heritage, all HEIs have had to address shifts in the role and nature of religion or belief in wider society.

Over the past few decades, the religion or belief composition of students and staff in UK HEIs has diversified substantially. This process has been extended by a growth in the number of international students, who have brought an even broader range of religion or belief positions.

Religion or belief has become a much more visible marker of identity, and in many institutions shapes thought and practice more than it did previously. Higher education has also seen, and been part of, a series of socio-cultural shifts in the place of religion or belief in UK society. Legal changes, including the Equality Act 2010, have established religion or belief as an equality strand with protected characteristics status in law. For UK higher education, these changes are challenging and require thoughtful responses.

HEIs are looking for evidence on which they can draw to develop policies, practices and procedures to improve the opportunities of staff and students for learning, teaching, research and employment, and their broader experiences on campus. This research is the first of its kind to focus on whether and how staff and students' experiences on campus differ because of their religion or belief. It is important to note that, in addressing matters relating to religion or belief (including discrimination or harassment on these grounds), 'belief' in this sense includes non-religious as well as religious beliefs. This follows equality and human rights law and related policy and practice.

The report aims to provide evidence of existing issues, and to highlight questions arising from the research for HEIs to consider in meeting potential challenges. It identifies a number of issues for consideration by the sector as a whole. It is hoped that the project will assist national bodies, including Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), and institutions in their work to improve the experiences of all staff and students. It will also be of interest to other external bodies, such as faith community, belief and inter-faith organisations, which may work to support HEIs in providing a positive learning and working environment for staff and students of various religion or belief backgrounds.

## The research

This report presents key evidence from 'Religion and belief in higher education: researching the experiences of staff and students', a research project commissioned by ECU.

The research methods used for this project took into consideration institutional contexts and backgrounds to religion or belief issues to ensure sensitivity to the issues involved. The project utilised the experience of the project stakeholder group in designing all research approaches.

A range of research methods were used, including:

- = national staff and student surveys
- = institutional case studies, focus groups and interviews
- = stakeholder engagement with national religion or belief groups, staff and students' unions, and equality and diversity practitioners
- = literature review

The project sought to collect a large number of staff and student experiences through the surveys, and to develop a comprehensive picture of the issues within each HEI. Case studies included observation and the collection of documentation as well as interviews or focus groups.

## Survey responses

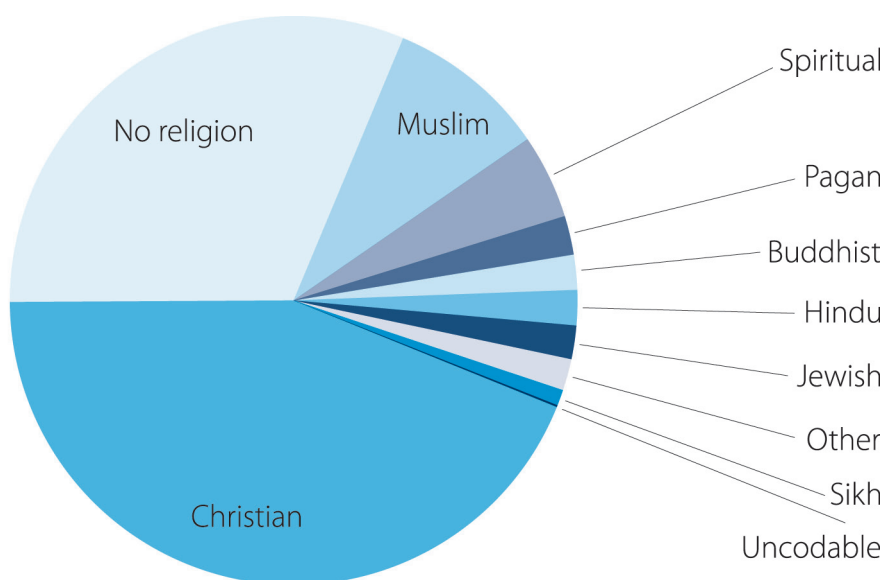
It is important to note that this survey was not intended to be statistically representative, as in higher education there is a current lack of the data that would allow the necessary sampling to take place. Because of the impossibility of constructing a precise sample, readers should not attempt to extrapolate figures and percentages given in this report across the sector as a whole.

Overall, 3077 staff and 3935 students responded to the survey. For both staff and students, the highest percentage of respondents considered themselves to be Christian. The second largest group in both cases were respondents who considered themselves to be of no religion (including atheist and secular respondents).

**Table 1.1 Student survey responses by religion or belief group**

	Number	Percentage
Christian	1724	43.8
No religion	1249	31.4
Muslim	356	9.1
Spiritual	187	4.8
Pagan	79	2.0
Buddhist	78	2.0
Hindu	77	2.0
Jewish	75	1.9
Other	70	1.8
Sikh	36	0.9
Uncodable	4	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3935</b>	<b>*</b>

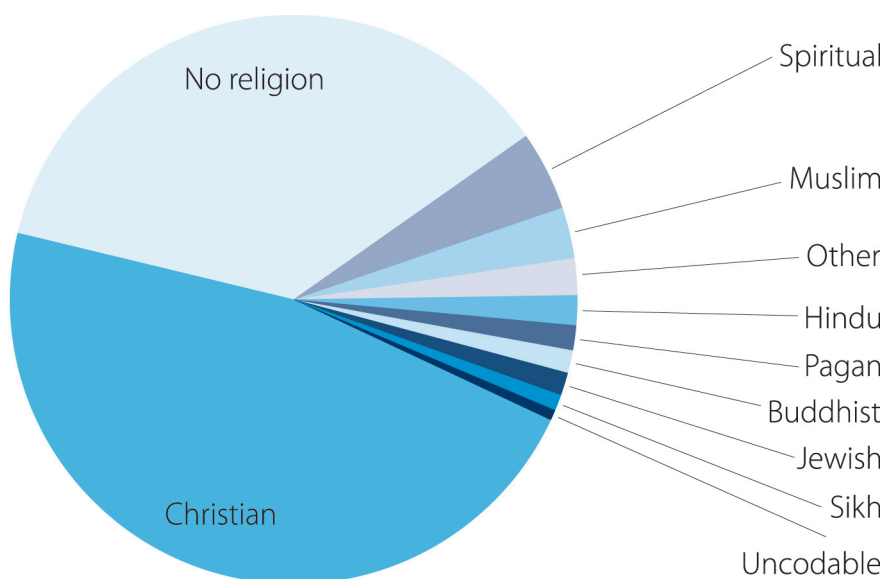
\* may not total exactly 100% due to rounding



**Table 1.2 Staff survey responses by religion or belief group**

	Number	Percentage
Christian	1442	46.8
No religion	1124	36.5
Spiritual	138	4.5
Muslim	90	2.9
Other	64	2.1
Hindu	53	1.7
Pagan	44	1.4
Buddhist	41	1.3
Jewish	39	1.3
Sikh	29	0.9
Uncodable	13	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>3077</b>	<b>*</b>

\* may not total exactly 100% due to rounding





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## Case studies

For the purposes of this research, the study distinguished between four broad categories of HEI:

- = collegiate ancient universities
- = redbrick universities
- = new universities
- = university colleges (colleges of higher education), including church colleges

The sample included two HEIs in each of the redbrick, modern and university college (college of higher education) categories, and one collegiate ancient university. Institutions were selected to ensure a geographical spread, including one in each of the four countries of the UK.

Full reports on the surveys and stakeholder meetings, and the literature review, can be found on the project website, [www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE](http://www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE).

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## The findings

This study examines the experiences of staff and students with a religion or belief in higher education through four themes developed through an examination of previous research and ongoing work with institutions, unions, student-led religion or belief organisations, and other stakeholders.

- = Participation and access
- = Accommodating religious observance
- = Discrimination and harassment
- = Good relations

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## Participation and access

HEIs, students' unions and students' societies have a role in ensuring that all staff and students can participate fully in higher education. With no previous legal obligation for HEIs outside Northern Ireland to monitor matters related to religion or belief, there is little evidence of the extent of participation across the sector.

**Access**

While some in religion or belief groups feel able to access the full range of activities and provision offered by HEIs, others feel unable to do so, at least in part because of their HEI's understanding of the requirements of their religion or belief and/or lack of institutional accommodation of these.

Equality legislation underpins public bodies' approaches to the provision of goods, services and education, and helps to ensure that all individuals, including those with a religion or belief or none, feel fully able to access and participate in university life.

**Data collection and consultation**

Data collection and consultation are important components in developing appropriate religion or belief-sensitive provision. An institution's ability to make judgments about the adequacy of its provision requires appropriate data collection.

In the case of religion or belief, the research has revealed that there is only patchy data-gathering of this information at any level – despite the fact that respondents and participants in the research generally were content for this to take place, subject to the provision of a clear rationale for data collection and the existence of appropriate controls over data collection and use.

**Table 2.1 Institutions' approaches to monitoring staff religion or belief**

	Number	Percentage
On an equal opportunities form when you applied for your job	1146	33.4
On HR forms related to your actual employment	408	11.9
On your employer's pension scheme forms	34	1.0
At your institution's health centre	38	1.1
None of these	598	17.4
Don't know	1209	35.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3433</b>	<b>100.0</b>

3052 people responded to the question, which allowed multiple responses. In total there were 3433 responses to the question.

**Table 2.2 Institutions' responses to monitoring student religion or belief identities**

	Number	Percentage
On forms when you applied to the university/college	1204	25.6
As information you are asked for when you access services at university/college	243	5.2
On university/college surveys	630	13.4
On enrolment at the university	777	16.5
None of these	1847	39.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4701</b>	<b>100.0</b>

3763 people responded to the question, which allowed multiple responses. In total there were 4701 responses to the question.

HEIs currently collect data on staff and students in a number of ways. These systems could be updated to gather information on religion and belief, which will support HEIs in England, Scotland and Wales to meet the new public sector equality duty.

## Teaching and learning

The overwhelming majority of students reported themselves satisfied with both the content and the teaching of their courses.

There is a level of variety among students by religion or belief group as to how far course content and teaching are seen to be sensitive to their religion or belief. There are also differences between how students feel about the degree of sensitivity to their religion or belief in course content and in approaches to teaching that content. Given the centrality of these matters to the core business of HEIs, there is likely to be value in future investigation into the intersections between the curriculum, teaching, and religion or belief.

The research reveals that some staff members are uncomfortable when confronted with decisions about the appropriate use of, or reference to, religion or belief-related materials. One institution has developed some guidance in these matters; there may be value in further work to uncover good practice in this area.

## **Dietary matters**

Although most staff and students have no dietary requirements related to their religion or belief, and are satisfied with provision at their institution, there are a number for whom the availability of appropriate catering is an issue. The research indicates that most individuals are content when there is a good range of food available that meets all dietary requirements across all catering provision.

Generally speaking, staff and students would welcome a more consistent approach to labelling, including indicating whether or not food is halal or kosher and how animals have been slaughtered.

## **Alcohol**

The availability and use of alcohol in a variety of settings is an issue for many staff and students. While this is not an issue solely related to religion or belief, many religious groups – particularly international students with religion or belief commitments – find that the almost ubiquitous presence of alcohol and the relative lack of alternatives increases their isolation and can lead to them feeling excluded. In some HEIs, this is particularly the case during induction or freshers' activities.

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## **Accommodating religious observance**

Many HEIs seek to ensure that institutional procedures take account of the diversity of religion or belief on campus, for example by timetabling academic assessments to avoid religious holy days.

## **Prayer, worship, meditation and celebration**

Most HEIs organise their academic year based around the calendar of public holidays, which itself aligns broadly with the western Christian (or Gregorian) calendar. This can be challenging for students and staff of other faiths (and sometimes Orthodox Christians) who wish to celebrate holy days and religious festivals. ECU recommends that HEIs endeavour to take major festivals into account when arranging examination and holiday timings.

It is unclear how far calendars that set out religious holidays and festivals are being utilised. This can mean that students may be forced to miss elements of their course if they wish to absent themselves in order to make religious observance. For staff, this can mean adjusting working patterns to accommodate

observances – such as extended lunch breaks for prayer – which can cause resentment from other colleagues, and concern about how other staff view this adjustment.

The provision of space for prayer, worship, meditation, contemplation and celebration is valued. Sensitive consideration is needed of how such space is allocated and managed to ensure fair access by all religion or belief groups.

Some HEIs regularly use religious, mainly Christian, buildings to accommodate examinations or degree ceremonies. This may result in members of other religion or belief groups feeling uncomfortable.

A number of HEIs incorporate prayer (and occasionally hymns or acts of worship) within the fabric of institutional activities such as graduation ceremonies. Although in principle this might be thought to give rise to inequality between religion or belief groups, there is little evidence to suggest that this a problem for the majority. However, a small minority – especially those of no religion – voiced concern, and where attendance is mandatory at events that also include acts of worship, this can cause resentment and be a source of anxiety.

There appears to be some inconsistency in terms of which religion or belief celebrations are recognised and celebrated by HEIs and/or students' unions. Some participants felt that decisions about which festivals to celebrate are made with no clear rationale, and expressed concern about the potential inequalities arising from this.

The research shows that religion or belief societies are particularly valued by many students and by some staff as an important part of their support networks.

## **Religious dress and symbols**

Relatively few participants in this study wish to wear religious dress or symbols. However, the research shows that those who do wish to observe certain dress codes can experience challenges while in higher education, particularly in programmes of study in medical or health-related disciplines, where clothing must meet health-and-safety requirements. This can cause students

some anxiety as they negotiate the tension to satisfy their own conscience and the requirements of the course.

Many HEIs require all staff and students to have photographic identity cards. This can pose issues for those female Muslims who cover their face. Some HEIs have developed and implemented policies and procedures that enable alternatives to photographic identity cards for this group. Where HEIs have done this, there is clarity for all about the processes for identification, and this ensures that no individual experiences discomfort when providing proof of identity.

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## **Discrimination and harassment**

Some evidence exists of discrimination and harassment of particular groups on campuses, for example, the Community Security Trust's report *Antisemitic incidents January–June 2009* (CST, 2009). However, there has been little systematic work to identify issues of discrimination and harassment across different religions or beliefs, or the extent to which institutional responses to incidents of discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion or belief might differ.

### **Levels of discrimination and harassment**

The overwhelming majority of respondents reported that they feel valued by their institution and that they had not experienced harassment or discrimination. However, some patterns emerged from the data in relation to the experiences of particular religion or belief groups.

As few monitoring data are collected on individuals' religion or belief identity, or on the number of incidences across the sector, it can be difficult to assess the level of discrimination and harassment within higher education in relation to other surveys. There may be a case for further research to explore this issue in more depth.

### **Types of discrimination and harassment**

While the research did not find discrimination and harassment to be particularly prevalent across the sector, respondents raised a number of incidents where it had taken place. Participants reported experiencing both direct and indirect discrimination and a variety of forms of harassment.

## **Institutional responses**

Many HEIs have complex structures, systems and policies, and there can be challenges in coordinating an institutional approach to religion or belief issues.

Institutional practices and policies are commonly produced by a range of institutional stakeholders (senior management, human resources, student support departments, students' unions, trade unions, chaplaincies and pastoral care departments, independent multi-faith centres and inter-faith organisations and programmes and, of course, academics and students themselves), and this picture is more complicated still in institutions with more federated structures.

Procedures are generally in place for incidents of discrimination and harassment to be reported. However, these procedures are not always given a high profile, and formal reporting of incidents appears to be infrequent.

There is a variety of sources of support for students with regard to religion or belief. These include academic staff, counsellors, students' union advisers, chaplaincy staff and other faith advisers. Students' unions commonly have a formal role in advocacy relating to discrimination and harassment; however, not all students are aware that this is the case, and not all feel that religion or belief issues will be taken seriously by their students' union.

Staff have fewer specific sources of support than students, but many HEIs provide dignity or equality advisers in addition to normal line management arrangements.

Policies that deal with quite a wide range of issues of discrimination and harassment are generally in place, but HEIs deal with the issue of religion or belief in a number of different ways.

## **Good relations**

While there is no commonly understood definition of good relations, there are a number of criteria that might be denoted as evidence of good relations (Johnson and Tatum, 2009). Segregation and separation may be aligned with the extent to which good relations between faith or belief groups are fostered on university campuses.

## **Interactions between members of religion or belief groups**

The extent to which segregation or separation of members of different religion or belief groups exists may be a good indicator of how far good relations are evident. The research revealed that many HEIs actively seek to promote good relations through shared activities.

## **Tensions between different protected characteristics**

The research indicates that in some cases there are tensions between religion or belief and other protected groups within higher education. Of particular note is the tension between religion or belief and sexual orientation.

## **Freedom of speech**

The overwhelming number of participants in the study believe that freedom of speech is valued within their own HEI. This is mirrored by the high numbers who feel comfortable in expressing their religion or belief on campus, although fewer feel comfortable with seeking to promote their particular religion or belief as something that others might consider adopting or following.



## Recommendations

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This UK-wide research into the experiences of staff and students in higher education with regard to religion or belief is intended to inform further development of inclusive policies and approaches to meet new legislative requirements and good practice.

The sector is currently dealing with issues relating to religion or belief in a careful and thoughtful manner with clear awareness of the law. The majority of staff and students are satisfied with the way in which their institution handles religion or belief issues. However, there are tensions and issues that HEIs and the sector as a whole may wish to examine further. It is important to recognise that institutions are likely to find themselves in the position of balancing the competing demands of different stakeholders.

A number of reflective questions presented in this report are designed to help HEIs, and the sector as a whole, develop strategic plans to address the issues identified by this study in a way that is appropriate for the institution and meets the law. They will provide the sector, HEIs and practitioners with a structure for thinking about some of the issues raised.

Many of the findings here will stimulate thinking within the context of a single institution. However, there are also a number of key issues that would benefit from further consideration at the sector level.

- = The need for national (and local) monitoring data – the lack of such data on the religion or belief make-up of the staff and student body in HEIs makes it difficult to link the findings of this research to more general data. The overwhelming majority of participants in the study indicated that they would be willing to provide information about their religion or belief as long as a clear rationale is given for collecting the data.
- = The position of alcohol in the student experience – alcohol clearly has an important part in the culture of (undergraduate) students, and this is unlikely to change as the result of any policy initiatives on behalf of the sector. However, this study suggests that for some students, particularly those with a religion or belief, the position of alcohol in many student activities acts as a barrier to participation. Many HEIs, students' unions and chaplaincies are aware of this and provide alternatives. The sector may wish to explore how these alternatives are working, and continue to discuss the appropriate place of alcohol in the student experience.

- = Freedom of speech – although the majority of staff and students expressed a belief that freedom of speech is valued, some staff have concerns about how to balance the right to freedom of expression with sensitivity to individuals' religion or belief.
- = The curriculum – this provides a space for individuals and groups to encounter and explore a range of issues relating to religion or belief. Issues may emerge across all disciplines, from theology to engineering, and there may be value in thinking further about how to support teaching staff in dealing with the intersection between religion or belief and the curriculum.

## Reflective questions

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Throughout this report, a number of reflective questions are posed.

These are designed to provide the sector, HEIs and practitioners with a structure for thinking about some of the issues raised. All the questions are gathered together here.

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### Participation and access

- = Should your institution start to gather more data in relation to religion or belief?
  - = Should the collection of religion or belief data be compulsory or voluntary?
  - = When collecting religion or belief data, should your HEI use the categories in the census?
  - = What role should HEIs take to support teaching that is both aware of religion or belief positions and sensitive to how they may intersect with the curriculum?
  - = Can food be labelled more appropriately to enable people with religion or belief to make more informed decisions about what they eat?
  - = How far do your HEI's catering arrangements meet the needs of students and staff, given the diversity of dietary requirements?
  - = Should the students' union and institution routinely provide non-alcoholic options in the programme at freshers' events?
  - = Should your HEI review the place that alcohol has within the institution?
  - = Is there value in providing alcohol-free alternatives that engage students and staff from all religion or belief groups?
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### Religious observance

- = When planning the academic timetable, in what ways can your institution accommodate individuals' requirements for religious observance?
- = Is the institution prepared for the fact that in 2015 and 2016 the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan will fall during the traditional exam period? Would any changes in policy or practice have wider implications for other religion or belief groups?
- = Under what circumstances is it appropriate for the institution to use religious buildings? How do staff and students of different religions or beliefs feel about this decision?

- = If your institution is church-related or Christian faith-informed, how far does it expect staff and students to participate in religious elements of institutional activities? How does the institution communicate these expectations?
- = How far are acts of worship integrated into institutional business? How does the institution accommodate individuals who do not share the institutional religion or belief position?
- = What provision does your institution make available for worship, meditation, prayer and celebration space? How is this space allocated and how are priorities decided between different groups?
- = How is information about institutional facilities for worship, meditation, prayer and celebration communicated to new staff and students?
- = What religion or belief occasions does your institution celebrate/mark? How have these celebrations been chosen and have any religion or belief positions been left out?
- = Does your institution provide clear guidance around religious dress codes? Do these address potential conflicts with health and safety requirements?
- = Does your institution have a clear policy about the use of photographic identity cards? Should alternative procedures be put in place for those who wish to cover their face as part of their religious observance?

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## **Discrimination and harassment**

- = What measures has your institution taken to prevent the creation of a 'hostile atmosphere', in line with the requirements of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006? Are these measures merely reactive, or are they in line with the positive equality duty to foster good relations?
- = Do your institution's equality and diversity policies include policies around religion or belief? How have these changed or developed in the light of recent changes in legislation?
- = Which stakeholders should be consulted when developing institutional policies around religion or belief?
- = What are your institution's obligations when harassment occurs in different contexts and locations (for example, classroom or cafeteria, university property or students' union property, students' union event or private gathering)? Are current regulations sufficient to deal with these complexities?

- = Should your HEI do more to raise the profile of policies and procedures in relation to addressing discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion or belief? If so, what practical steps can be taken?
- = Does the sector need to explore further the approaches used to collect data on religion or belief and on incidents of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion or belief?
- = Should your HEI work with community organisations such as the Community Security Trust to feed into broader community-based reporting mechanisms?
- = How can your institution, students' union and chaplaincy work together most effectively to deal with religion or belief issues?

## Good relations

- = Should your institution develop policies and strategies to facilitate good relations between members of different religion or belief groups?
- = Can the sector develop any further guidance and models of practice to help HEIs deal with complex issues around the tensions between different protected characteristics?
- = What effects do certain sorts of discourse (and in some cases, harassment and discrimination) have on the ability of others in a university community to practise their right to freedom of speech? Does this have an impact on their right to express their belief or religion on campus?
- = What is the difference between freedom of speech and academic freedom? Should different regulations apply in the context of the curriculum versus extracurricular activities at university?
- = When tensions between equality strands occur, what tools exist (or should exist) within HEIs to resolve them?
- = Should HEIs or the sector as a whole develop clearer guidelines about attempts to bring others over to your point of view? The purpose of such guidelines could be to clarify commitments to freedom of speech and to sharpen definitions of what actually meets the legal definition of harassment.

# 1 Introduction

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A range of religious and other kinds of beliefs have always played an important role in UK higher education. Many higher education institutions (HEIs) were founded as religious institutions and retain this heritage in a variety of ways. Conversely, there are also many institutions that were founded in a self-consciously secular tradition and whose culture reflects this position.

Regardless of their institutional ethos, HEIs have had to address shifts in the role and nature of religion and belief in wider society. Since the second world war, the UK has become increasingly multi-ethnic and multi-faith, which has meant that staff and student populations in higher education are increasingly diverse. In higher education, this process has been extended further by a growth in international students, who have brought an even broader range of religion or belief positions.

Alongside the increasing diversity in religion or belief among its population, higher education has also seen, and been part of, a series of socio-cultural shifts in the place of religion or belief in UK society. Secularising trends have been met with counter-trends such as the growth of religiously based schooling. Legal changes have established religion or belief as an equality strand with a protected characteristics status in law. For UK higher education, these changes are challenging and require thoughtful responses.

This report describes the findings of an empirical investigation into the experiences of staff and students in higher education, and provides questions that HEIs may reflect on in supporting their staff and students on campus. The report is based on four research themes: participation and access, religious observation, discrimination and harassment, and good relations. The project team analysed data collected during the study under these themes. Where other issues emerged during the study, these are discussed in terms of areas for further work.

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## 1.1 Background

During the 1990s and 2000s there was a broad social, political and legal debate around the intersection of discrimination and religion or belief. As part of that debate, in April 1999 the Home Office commissioned research into Religious discrimination in England and Wales (Weller et al, 2001). Although that project was broader in focus, and engaged with religious organisations and individuals rather than with HEIs specifically, it included some attention to higher education.

The project's final report highlighted the following findings in relation to unfair treatment on the basis of religion in HEIs:

- = two-thirds or more of Muslim organisations reported unfair treatment from other staff and students in higher education, and from the policies and practices of HEIs
- = unfair treatment from other students was also mentioned by two-thirds or more of Jewish and Sikh organisations, and by five of the seven black-led churches answering this question
- = while over 40% of Christian organisations mentioned unfair treatment from other staff and students, only around half this proportion said their members had experienced unfair treatment from the policies and practices of HEIs

Soon after this research, the National Association for Teachers in Further and Higher Education published *Discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief* (NATFHE, 2002). This helped HEIs prepare for the introduction, in 2003, of the employment (religion or belief) regulations, which brought obligations for HEIs relating to religion or belief, both as employers and providers of vocational training. These regulations came in the wake of the implementation, in 2000, of the Human Rights Act 1998, which, for the first time in the UK outside Northern Ireland, introduced legal responsibilities concerning religion or belief for public bodies, including HEIs. In response to the regulations, ECU (2005) issued its guidance on *Employing people in higher education: religion and belief*.

Other relevant legislation has since come into force, including the Religious and Racial Hatred Act 2006, prior to which Universities UK, ECU, and the Standing Conference of Principals issued a policy and practice document entitled *Promoting good campus relations: dealing with hate crimes and intolerance* (Universities UK et al, 2005). Subsequently, the Equality Act 2006 came into force, which has recently been further updated, integrated and consolidated by the Equality Act 2010.

The Equality Act 2010 reforms and harmonises discrimination law in the UK and strengthens the law relating to equality. The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate against anyone on grounds of one of nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief (including lack of belief), sex, and sexual orientation. Significantly, the Act introduces a new

public sector equality duty, covering religion and belief, in relation to which HEIs must show due regard to:

- = eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
- = advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
- = foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it

In what is still a developing area of policy and law, there remains some contestation around what is appropriately included in and excluded from definitions of belief under the law. The case of *Grainger plc and others v. Nicholson* suggests that for a philosophical belief (including, in this case, philosophical belief on climate change) to afford this protection, it must:

- = be genuinely held
- = be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on the present state of information available
- = be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour
- = attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance
- = be worthy of respect in a democratic society and not incompatible with human dignity and/or conflict with the fundamental rights of others

The Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) in this case accepted that although support for a political party would *not* be considered a philosophical belief, belief in political philosophies such as socialism, Marxism, communism or free-market capitalism might qualify. Further to this, the EAT noted that a racist or homophobic political philosophy would not qualify as a philosophical belief as the belief must be worthy of respect in a democratic society and not incompatible with human dignity.

The EAT accepted that a philosophical belief could be based entirely on scientific conclusions. The EAT gave the example of Darwinism, which it said must plainly be capable of being a philosophical belief.



For further information on the legal context in the UK, see the ECU religion and belief law pages: [www.ecu.ac.uk/law](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/law). For discussions of the broader research evidence relating to religious discrimination in Britain over the past decade, see Weller's (2011) review of relevant evidence over the decade 2000–10.

Academic interest in the place of religion or belief in UK higher education has grown alongside these policy developments. An unpublished UK-wide survey of HEI policies relating to religion and chaplaincy provision fed into *Higher education and student religious identity* (Gilliat-Ray, 1999). *Religion in higher education: the politics of the multi-faith campus* (Gilliat-Ray, 2000) continues to provide a strong foundation for discussion of religion or belief in higher education.

More recently, the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) commissioned the religious literacy leadership in higher education project ([www.religiousliteracyHE.org](http://www.religiousliteracyHE.org)), for which a phase one programme evaluation and a number of case studies for promoting reflection and leadership action have been published (Dinham and Jones, 2010, 2011).

Within the religion and society programme of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), there is an ongoing project on Christianity and university experience in contemporary England ([www.cueproject.org.uk](http://www.cueproject.org.uk)). A more detailed review of the relevant academic literature is provided in appendix 4 ([www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religion-and-belief-staff-and-students-in-he](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religion-and-belief-staff-and-students-in-he)).

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## 1.2 Aims

This study examines the experiences of staff and students with a religion or belief in higher education through four themes:

- = participation and access
- = accommodating religious observance
- = discrimination and harassment
- = good relations

These themes were developed through an examination of previous research and ongoing work with institutions, unions, student-led religion or belief organisations and other stakeholders.

At the outset it is important to make clear that, in addressing matters relating to religion or belief (including discrimination or harassment on these grounds), belief in this sense includes non-religious as well as religious beliefs. This follows equality and human rights law and related policy and practice.

### **1.2.1 Participation and access**

HEIs, students' unions and students' societies have a role in ensuring that all staff and students can participate fully in higher education. With no previous legal obligation for HEIs outside Northern Ireland to monitor matters related to religion or belief, there is little evidence of the extent of participation across the sector. The research explores:

- = the reported experiences and perceptions that staff and students have of being able or unable to participate in higher education because of their religion or belief
- = how staff and students perceive their religion or belief to affect their social, academic and employment interactions on campus
- = whether the religion or belief of a member of staff or a student influences their choice of HEI
- = whether staff and students are comfortable in disclosing their religion or belief
- = how staff and students of different religion or belief perceive they are able to contribute to the design and delivery of their HEI's policies and practices

### **1.2.2 Accommodating religious observance**

Many HEIs seek to ensure that institutional procedures take account of the diversity of religion or belief on campus, for example by timetabling academic assessments to avoid religious holy days. The research explores:

- = how comfortable staff and students are in expressing and/or observing their religion or belief on campus
- = how staff and students perceive their HEI to accommodate their religious observance
- = what reactions, if any, a student or staff member who uses targeted or inclusive services for religion or belief, or other inclusive arrangements implemented by the HEI, receives from staff or students

### 1.2.3 Discrimination and harassment relating to religion or belief

Some evidence exists of discrimination and harassment of particular groups on campuses, for example, the Community Security Trust's report *Antisemitic incidents January-June 2009* (CST, 2009). However, there has been little systematic work to identify issues of discrimination and harassment across different religions or beliefs, or the extent to which institutional responses to incidents of discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion or belief might differ.

The report explores the experience of discrimination and harassment across different religions or beliefs within higher education, and what kinds of policies and procedures are currently in place to address this. This includes:

- = the extent to which staff and students are aware of, and making use of, institutional procedures for issues of discrimination and harassment on campus, including, for example, reporting and responding to incidents
- = staff and students' reasons for not making use of such procedures, where this is the case
- = the extent to which staff and students make use of external support mechanisms, for example, national or local faith community bodies
- = what can be done to support HEIs in establishing robust reporting and evidence-gathering systems for discrimination and harassment
- = what can be done to encourage staff and students to use institutional reporting procedures
- = how HEIs respond to reported incidents of discrimination and harassment
- = the role that students' unions play in reporting and dealing with incidents of discrimination and harassment

### 1.2.4 Good relations

While there is no commonly understood definition of good relations, there are a number of criteria that might be denoted as evidence of good relations (Johnson and Tatum, 2009). Segregation and separation may be aligned with the extent to which good relations between faith or belief groups are fostered on university campuses. This research explores:

- = interactions between religion or belief groups on campus and with groups off campus, and the roles of chaplaincies in facilitating these relations
- = conflicts between equality strands and the extent to which institutional policies and procedures ensure equal rights for all while maintaining an individual's right to express their identity by adopting a religion or belief stance
- = freedom of speech, including the extent to which staff and students are able to maintain religious tolerance and non-discriminatory practices while ensuring individual rights to freedom of expression

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## 1.3 Methods

The research methods used for this project took into consideration institutional contexts and backgrounds to religion and belief issues to ensure sensitivity to the issues involved. The project utilised the experience of the project stakeholder group in designing all research approaches.

The methods used included:

- = an online project survey
- = participation in project focus groups
- = institutional interviews
- = a literature review
- = work with religion or belief societies and student unions

Full details of the research approaches adopted and the rationale for selection of the sample can be found in appendix 1.

The project sought to collect a large number of experiences of staff and students through the surveys, and to develop a comprehensive picture of the issues within each HEI. Case studies included observation and the collection of documentation as well as interviews or focus groups.

### 1.3.1 Participation in the fieldwork

It is important to note that this survey was not intended to be statistically representative, as there is a current lack of the data in higher education that would allow the necessary sampling to take place. Because of the impossibility of constructing a precise sample, readers should not attempt to extrapolate figures and percentages given in this report across the sector as a whole.

**Table 1.1 Student survey responses by religion or belief group**

	Number	Percentage
Christian	1724	43.8
No religion	1249	31.4
Muslim	356	9.1
Spiritual	187	4.8
Pagan	79	2.0
Buddhist	78	2.0
Hindu	77	2.0
Jewish	75	1.9
Other	70	1.8
Sikh	36	0.9
Uncodable	4	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3935</b>	<b>*</b>

\* may not total exactly 100% due to rounding

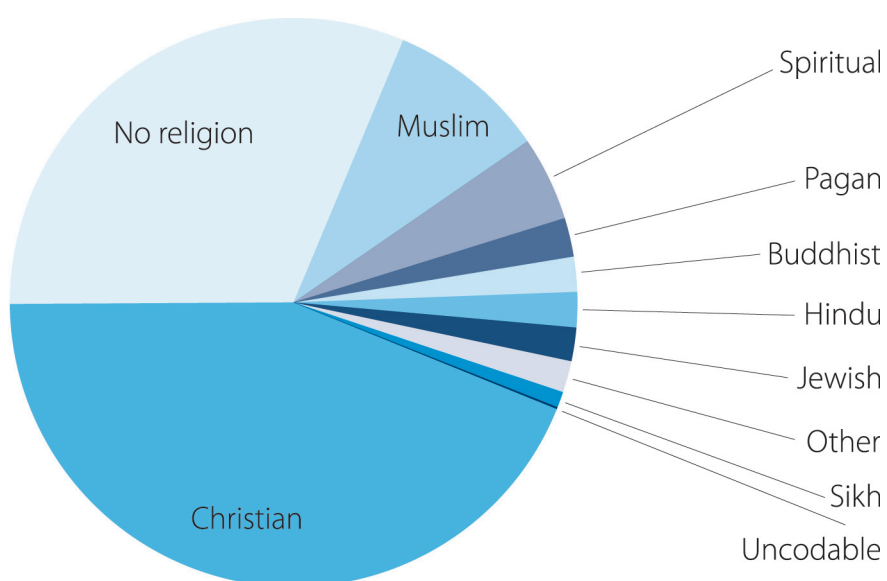
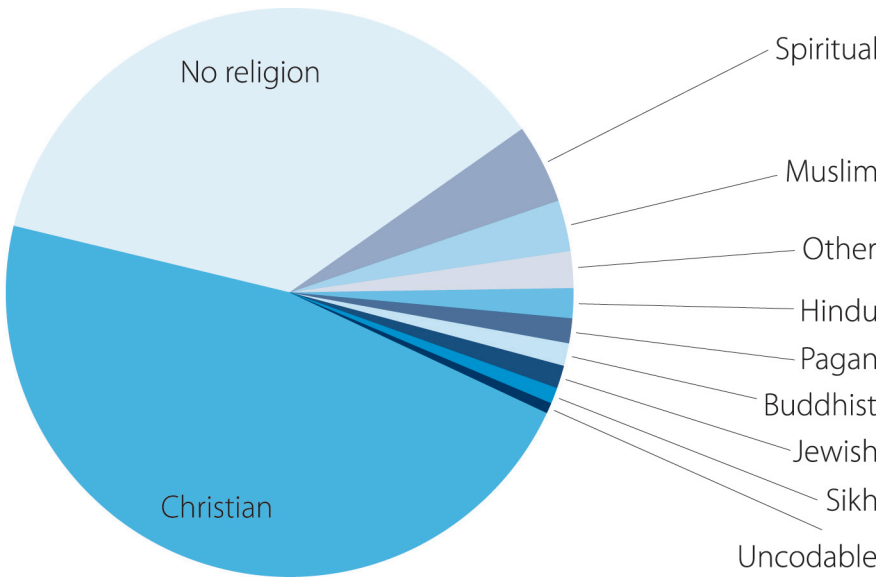


Table 1.2 Staff survey responses by religion or belief group

	Number	Percentage
Christian	1442	46.8
No religion	1124	36.5
Spiritual	138	4.5
Muslim	90	2.9
Other	64	2.1
Hindu	53	1.7
Pagan	44	1.4
Buddhist	41	1.3
Jewish	39	1.3
Sikh	29	0.9
Uncodable	13	0.4
Total	3077	*

\* may not total exactly 100% due to rounding



### 1.3.2 Case studies

For the purposes of this research, the study, following Gilliat-Ray (2000), distinguished between four broad categories of higher education institution:

- = collegiate ancient universities
- = redbrick universities
- = new universities
- = university colleges (colleges of higher education), including church colleges

The sample included two HEIs in each of the redbrick, modern, and university college (college of higher education) categories and one collegiate ancient university. Institutions were selected to ensure a geographical spread, including one in each of the four countries of the UK. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, anonymity has been maintained for all participating case study HEIs.

## 2 Participation and access

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This chapter considers the extent to which staff and student voices are used to influence services, and the extent to which individuals feel empowered to participate in certain aspects of university life.

In defining participation and thinking about access and empowerment, this research draws on the definition of Sidorenko (2006) of participation as the 'process of taking part in different spheres of societal life such as political, economic, social, cultural and other aspects of life'.

This definition is closely linked to the concept of empowerment and, within this concept, participation can take a number of forms, including:

- = direct participation
- = representational participation (for example by selecting representatives from membership-based groups and associations)
- = political participation
- = information-based participation (for example through consultation activities that allow views to be expressed as data communicated to decision makers)

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### 2.1 Data collection and consultation

Opportunities to contribute data or information to decision-making processes are key to participation – in this case about academic and social provisions that take appropriately sensitive account of religion or belief.

#### 2.1.1 Monitoring

Outside Northern Ireland, data on the religion or belief orientation of staff and student populations is not routinely collected at a national level across HEIs, although some HEIs do undertake such collection. Not only does the absence of such data across the sector make the research design and analysis of the data difficult (as there are no wider-sector benchmarks in these matters), it also makes it difficult for individual institutions to judge appropriate responses and to monitor the effectiveness of any measures taken.

The research sought to give an indication of the extent to which individual organisations routinely collect data on staff and student religion or belief identities.



Responses to a question asking if institutions monitor religion and belief in relation to employment indicate that there are grounds for thinking that more HEIs use equal opportunities forms accompanying job application forms than other types of monitoring.

**Table 2.1 Institutions' approaches to monitoring staff religion or belief**

	Number	Percentage
On an equal opportunities form when you applied for your job	1146	33.4
On HR forms related to your actual employment	408	11.9
On your employer's pension scheme forms	34	1.0
At your institution's health centre	38	1.1
None of these	598	17.4
Don't know	1209	35.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3433</b>	<b>100.0</b>

3052 people responded to the question, which allowed multiple responses. In total there were 3433 responses to the question.

Responses from students suggest that monitoring of students' religion or belief identities is not widespread across the sector. However, table 2.2 shows that, where such questions are asked, they are probably asked during application processes.

**Table 2.2 Institutions' responses to monitoring student religion or belief identities**

	Number	Percentage
On forms when you applied to the university/college	1204	25.6
As information you are asked for when you access services at university/college	243	5.2
On university/college surveys	630	13.4
On enrolment at the university	777	16.5
None of these	1847	39.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>4701</b>	<b>100.0</b>

3763 people responded to the question, which allowed multiple responses. In total there were 4701 responses to the question.

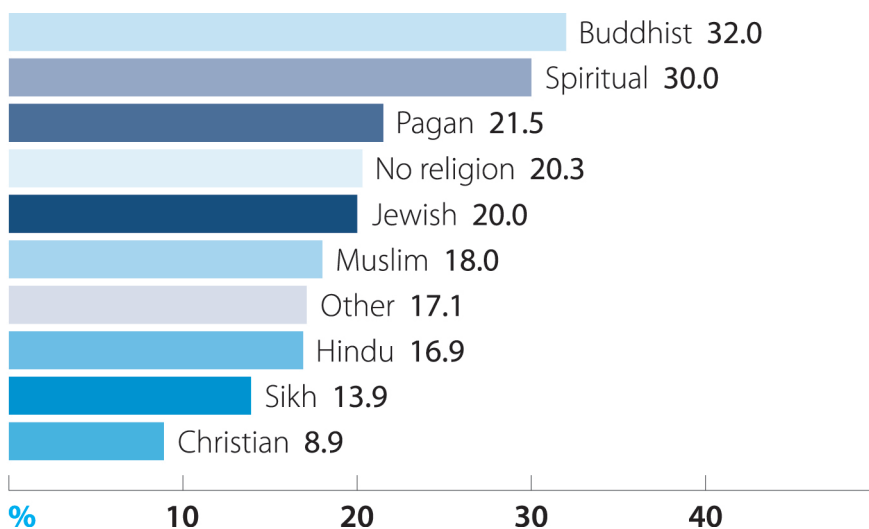
The survey suggests that data about staff and students' religion or belief identity are not routinely collected. Against this background, the survey sought to establish the extent to which individuals would be prepared to disclose their religion or belief to the university.

3911 students and 3056 staff responded to the question asking whether they were content with disclosing their religion or belief to their university. Both staff and students' results indicated that an overwhelming majority of respondents would be prepared to do so (80.3% and 84.3%, respectively). However, differences emerge when responses are analysed by religion or belief group. Buddhist students (32%) and Pagan staff (34%) are more likely to feel uncomfortable with disclosing their religion or belief identity to their HEI. This compares with 8.9% of those Christian students answering the survey. Tables 2.3 and 2.4 show the number of students and staff who feel uncomfortable disclosing their religion or belief identity to their university.

**Table 2.3 Number of students who feel uncomfortable disclosing their religion or belief identity to their university**

	Number	Percentage*
Buddhist	25	32.0
Spiritual	56	30.0
Pagan	17	21.5
No religion	254	20.3
Jewish	15	20.0
Muslim	64	18.0
Other	12	17.1
Hindu	13	16.9
Sikh	5	13.9
Christian	153	8.9
Uncodable	1	25.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>615</b>	

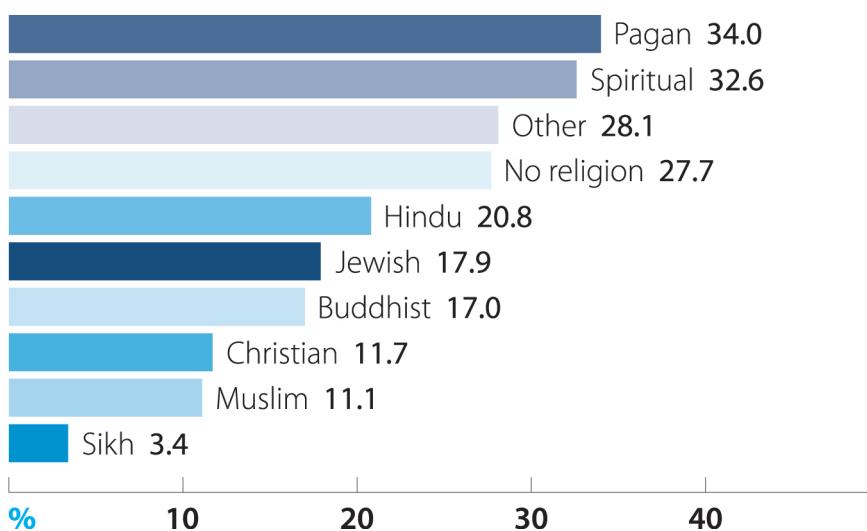
\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question



**Table 2.4 Number of staff who feel uncomfortable disclosing their religion or belief identity to their university**

	Number	Percentage*
Pagan	15	34.0
Spiritual	45	32.6
Other	18	28.1
No religion	311	27.7
Hindu	11	20.8
Jewish	7	17.9
Buddhist	7	17.0
Christian	169	11.7
Muslim	10	11.1
Sikh	1	3.4
Uncodable	8	61.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>602</b>	

\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question



**'It does make good business sense to know who you have in your organisation ... You need to create an environment in which people feel comfortable to volunteer [information]'**

The majority of both staff and students are content to disclose such information, suggesting that fundamental opposition to routine collection of this data is not widespread. Institutions should ensure that their data-collection processes are sensitive to the concerns of different groups. Students and staff will be familiar with the religious affiliation questions that have been asked through the national census.

Therefore there might be a case that the form of any similar data collection in HEIs could benefit from being modelled on wider data. However, in this survey, quite large numbers of staff and students elected to use the option 'spiritual' to describe their religion or belief identity – an option not offered in the census.

If institutional data on religion or belief are benchmarked using census data, it is important that there is wide understanding about what such data may or may not tell us in relation to religion or belief (Voas and Bruce, 2004; Weller, 2004). This is because census questions are concerned primarily with religious identification/affiliation, and do not provide information on either the prevalence or nature of belief in relation to such identification, nor the question of practice.

Data collected during the case studies indicate that, while there is a general acceptance that data collection of this type would prove useful to HEIs, staff and students feel the collection of data needs to be contextualised. One students' union manager explained:

'It does make good business sense to know who you have in your organisation as this informs policies and procedures. I know the value of data and I would certainly encourage the collecting of it, but you need to contextualise it, make it clear why you're doing it. You can't enforce it. You need to create an environment in which people feel comfortable to volunteer it.'

### 2.1.2 Consultation

Results from the survey indicate that both staff and student respondents have experienced low levels of consultation in relation to religion or belief matters. 82.3% of 3917 students and 83.3% of 3066 staff indicated that they had not been consulted about matters relating to their religion or belief. These findings were supported by fieldwork visits. At the same time, in the instances where HEIs offered consultation, it was not always evident that staff or students responded.

‘We don’t get many responses to our calls for consultation. It depends on the time of year as to how many responses we get. We had one last week and there were only nine students who turned up, this might be down to the time of year. When you think we have 20,000 students, it’s not a lot.’

The data suggest that consultation around religion and belief issues remains relatively uncommon in the sector. Given that consultation can be an effective tool for helping to develop policies and processes that meet staff and student needs, this may be an area that needs more exploration. There might also be a case for organisations to ask about religion and belief as part of more general monitoring and consultation processes to help understanding about how these areas intersect with other issues.

Should your institution start to gather more data in relation to religion or belief?

Should the collection of religion or belief data be compulsory or voluntary?

When collecting religion or belief data, should your institution use the categories in the census?

## 2.2 Teaching and learning

The content and delivery of many academic courses has the potential to conflict with an individual's religion or belief, which may affect their ability to participate fully in academic life.

For 48.1% and 46.9% of respondents, religion or belief is not considered relevant to course content and teaching, respectively.

The survey found that students were overwhelmingly satisfied (over 95% of responses) with their course and with their general experience of being a student. The survey then asked respondents to consider their experiences of their course in relation to their religion and belief (tables 2.5 and 2.6). In response to these questions, a small minority of respondents indicated that there were elements of their course, or the teaching of their course, that were presented in a way that was not sensitive to their religion or belief.

**Table 2.5 The extent to which course content is presented in a way that is sensitive to their religion or belief**

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	381	9.7
Agree	479	12.2
Neither agree nor disagree	795	20.3
Disagree	248	6.3
Strongly disagree	130	3.3
My religion is not relevant to my course	1887	48.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3920</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2.6 The extent to which teaching on courses is conducted in a way that is sensitive to their religion or belief**

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	380	9.7
Agree	507	13.0
Neither agree nor disagree	781	20.0
Disagree	269	6.9
Strongly disagree	141	3.6
My religion is not relevant to my course	1836	46.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>3914</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed that course content (table 2.7) or teaching (table 2.8) is sensitive to religion or belief were analysed by religion and belief group. In general, students felt similarly about course content and teaching; however, there were some differences relating to particular religion and belief positions.

**Table 2.7 Number of students who either disagreed or strongly disagreed that course content is sensitive to their religion of belief**

	Number	Percentage*
Muslim	52	15.0
Christian	220	12.8
Jewish	9	12.0
Buddhist	9	11.6
Other	8	11.4
Pagan	7	8.9
Spiritual	13	6.7
Hindu	5	6.5
Sikh	2	5.6
No religion	53	4.2
Uncodable	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>378</b>	

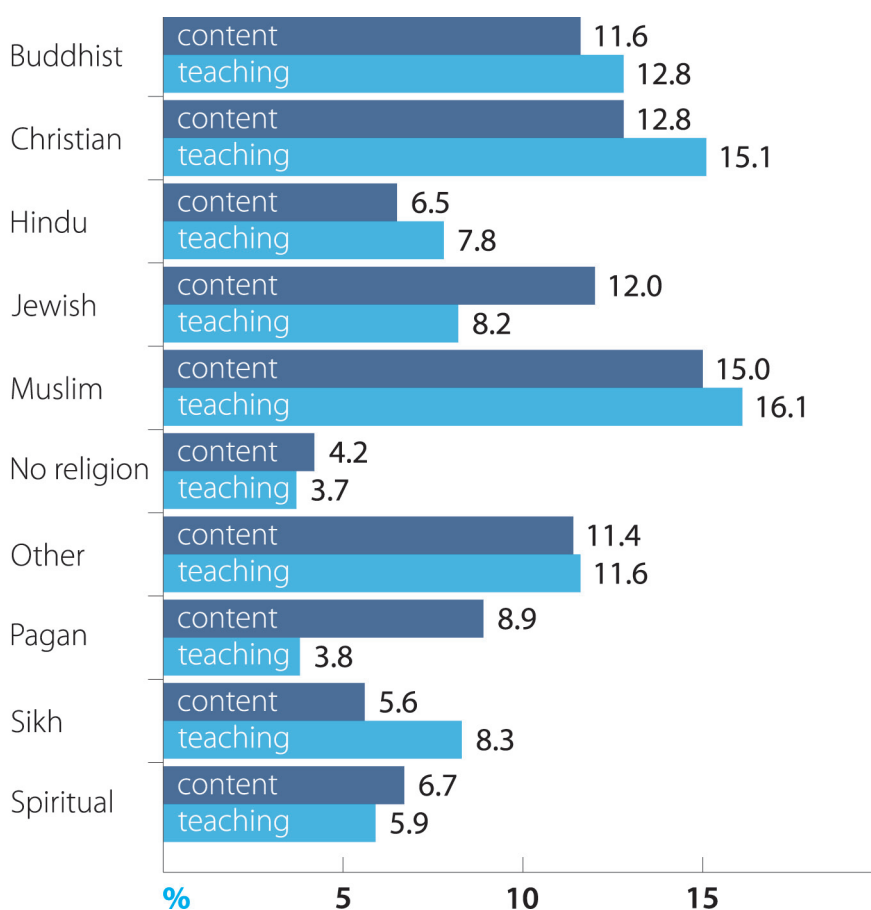
\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question



**Table 2.8 Number of students who either disagreed or strongly disagreed that programme teaching is sensitive to their religion of belief**

	Number	Percentage*
Muslim	57	16.1
Christian	260	15.1
Buddhist	10	12.8
Other	8	11.6
Sikh	3	8.3
Jewish	6	8.2
Hindu	6	7.8
Spiritual	11	5.9
Pagan	3	3.8
No religion	46	3.7
Uncodable	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>410</b>	

\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question



**‘Because we are studying it academically, if someone gets out of hand people just shoot you down’**

The discrepancies between perceptions of course content and teaching merit further investigation. It may be that issues such as the timetabling of lectures and examinations may influence students’ feelings about how programmes are taught, while not affecting their attitudes to course content. However, there is likely to be a range of more subtle issues about the approach towards teaching that further study could illuminate.

It may be that the perceived lack of sensitivity emerges as part of the presentation and discussion of course content, rather than in relation to the course content itself (although this distinction can at times be extremely subtle).

Students studying programmes where discussion takes place regarding ethics can find themselves articulating positions that are informed by the values system of their religion or belief. Some academic staff take the position that advocacy of such positions – within academic argument – is acceptable, but others do not view this as legitimate. A Christian student on a religious studies course explained a response that was taken by fellow students when personal belief systems entered into the academic discussion of religion:

‘Because we are studying it academically, if someone gets out of hand people just shoot you down. They’ll say; out of order, it’s an academic class. Just chill out!’

Sometimes students experience internal conflict between the different issues that are highlighted during their studies. Issues of ethics, for example, might challenge certain religious doctrines. One student explained that sometimes during discussion they find themselves defending a position that is in line with their own religious standpoint, which has caused peers to criticise them for introducing religion into the argument. In this instance, they have needed to defend their views and ability to be objective.

Religion or belief can have an important impact on the way students approach learning. One medical student explained that those on the course have a lot of opportunity to interact with the public, and that faith can play an important role, particularly around sensitive issues such as death and dying:

'If you come from a particular faith, you will approach issues from the perspective of your faith so, for example, you may believe in the afterlife whereas your patient might not, or vice versa.'

**For some life sciences students, the issue of the dissection of animals can be a concern on the grounds of religion or belief. Where animals are used for experiments, some tutors provide a period of reflection about the procedure and ask students how the activity has enhanced their understanding of the subject. This is seen as a very helpful activity. One Hindu student noted:**

'The great thing about this university is at the end of the experiment, when you have got a dead animal in front of you, we have a ten or fifteen minute discussion. We think about whether it has been useful. Was there any point in having this animal put down in order to learn? How can we change it for next year? They are constantly asking us about this so that we don't take things for granted. At the end of the term, they ask the same question of the whole student group. I like the fact that it's out in the open. Sometimes I agree, sometimes I don't. Often it's; come and have a go if you want to. I really appreciate their consideration.'

**The teaching of some subjects can heighten the sensitivity of some academics to views expressed from a religion or belief perspective. One law academic explained:**

'I am conscious of the way I interact with students who may or may not be religious. I teach modules which include discussion about ethical issues. I teach a class on canon law. I am more aware of the need to keep it academic as opposed to when I am teaching criminal law.'

**Some university staff expressed concerns about how to deal with academic issues when students engage with these from a stance that is clearly informed by their religion or belief. One inclusive curriculum officer explained that some academics are concerned about how to deal with students who use religious doctrines to illustrate academic arguments.**

'It's OK to mark down a student who only quotes religious authorities without being critical of the religious standpoint.'

'We wanted to make sure that people didn't absent themselves from particular classes or modules based on what the content was going to be.'

Many HEIs provide opportunities for staff to undergo diversity training, and some offer information to academics and other staff to help them manage issues of religion or belief. One participating university produced guidelines to address the use of potentially controversial resources. These require staff to be able to articulate why they are using a particular resource, and to be explicit about this when developing learning outcomes. There is a clear rationale for this approach.

What role should HEIs take to support teaching that is both aware of religion or belief positions and sensitive to how they may intersect with the curriculum?

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### 2.3 Dietary matters

HEIs are responsible, both directly and indirectly, for the supply of food to staff and students through a number of outlets, including shops, canteens, restaurants, student residences, buffets at meetings and social events. Many HEIs are mindful of the dietary requirements of staff and students. This is reflected in the responses to the survey.

Responses indicated that 18.1% of student respondents and 10.4% of staff respondents have dietary requirements in relation to their religion or belief.

Despite many HEIs working to provide for these dietary requirements, 19.7% of students and 17.1% of staff respondents believed that no provision is made. Respondents to the survey made comments such as:

'In addition to there not being any facilities providing halal or only vegetarian food, there is nowhere to eat in the university with strict separation of meat and vegetarian food.'

'Food would have to be made by baptised Sikhs so normally I just take a packed lunch. Saves the effort.'

**Table 2.9 Number of students indicating that their institution makes no provision for dietary requirements by religion or belief group**

	Number	Percentage*
Jewish	23	30.7
Muslim	79	22.2
Sikh	7	19.4
Other	7	10.0
Hindu	6	7.8
Spiritual	3	1.6
Buddhist	1	1.3
Christian	9	0.5
No religion	5	0.4
Pagan	0	0
Uncodable	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>140</b>	

\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question

**Table 2.10 Number of staff indicating that their institution makes no provision for dietary requirements by religion or belief group**

	Number	Percentage*
Jewish	11	28.2
Muslim	20	22.2
Other	5	7.8
Hindu	4	7.5
Pagan	3	6.8
Sikh	1	3.5
Spiritual	1	0.7
Christian	9	0.6
No religion	3	0.3
Buddhist	0	0
Uncodable	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	

\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question

**‘...most Muslim students, including myself, do not eat at the cafeterias’**

Data gathered during fieldwork indicate that, while HEIs may make some provision for a range of dietary needs, this is not always applied consistently across catering outlets or for each religion or belief group. In particular, there seem to be particular issues relating to Jewish and Muslim (and to a lesser extent Sikh) dietary requirements. Jewish respondents explained:

‘The university should make kosher food available on campus, but it does not at present.’

‘Understandably there may not be a huge market for providing kosher food, however I fail to understand why the sandwiches not containing meat couldn’t be supplied from a kosher supplier, and would still be the same, ie egg mayo but kosher!’

**Muslim respondents to the survey made similar comments, noting:**

‘Halal food outlets on campus would be beneficial, as taking the vegetarian option all the time can become boring and also one cannot always be sure that vegetarian food has been handled with care without being contaminated by using utensils that have already been used to handle non-vegetarian foods. More care and assurance needs to be shown with this matter especially.’

‘My university has a halal certificate but does not clearly state what is halal and what is not, so most Muslim students, including myself, do not eat at the cafeterias.’

**However, despite the similarity of the issues experienced by both Jewish and Muslim respondents (along with others), there were also a number of comments on the inequality of provision for different religion and belief groups.**

‘There is always adequate provision for Muslim colleagues but not Hindus.’

‘There is plenty of halal food, but never anything kosher.’

**‘fewer people would think it acceptable to challenge or mock our dietary requirements if they were based on religion’**

‘It is additionally frustrating to me and other vegans I know that our philosophical position is viewed as insufficiently deserving of recognition when compared with religious beliefs about diet which more often appear to be lacking in any rational basis. It has often been apparent to me and others in my position that if we said our dietary requirements derived from a religious belief they would be much more likely to be met, and fewer people would think it acceptable to challenge or mock our dietary requirements if they were based on religion.’

While many participants recognised that there were logistical issues involved in serving the dietary needs of smaller religion and belief groups, the quotes above demonstrate the possibility of inequitable dietary provision which could lead to poor relations between different religion or belief groups, and between religion or belief groups and the institution.

The possibility for tension between the ethical beliefs of some parties and the religion or belief of others was also observed during case study research.

‘In one college they banned halal food. Instead of taking a step forward they took a step back. They serve kosher food but they don’t serve halal food. They say it’s inhumane. They say halal food is barbaric. I felt quite angry about that. It doesn’t make sense if they have kosher food.’

Some HEIs have taken the decision to provide only halal meat and, where this is the case, this has caused some concerns. One respondent to the survey explained:

‘Generally, vegetarian food is well catered for; however, the advent of halal food fails to recognise that many communities, including non-vegetarian Hindus and Sikhs, find this type of meat served by default to be morally unacceptable.’

The provision of food in HEIs is complicated by variations in contracting arrangements between caterers and different parts of the university. This can mean that some outside caterers provide a range of food suitable for different dietary needs in one part of the university, such as students’ union outlets, but this is not replicated in other areas.

'As the students' union it is one of the fights we have with the university. Because there are issues around pricing and the company that the university deals with, we don't even delve into the dietary requirements. It's just not good enough on any level. I have to say, as the students' union, I am quite proud of our shop. It provides all types of food. We provide that as the union, but it is one of our campaigns with the institution: to provide food facilities which reflects our student and staff body.'

Staff can be affected by their dietary needs going unmet at institutional meetings and events where food is provided. Many HEIs do make a concerted attempt at providing a range of foods, but this is not always the case. Vegetarian options are common, but some of these are unsuitable for certain dietary observance, and this particularly affects some religion or belief groups, for example those requiring dairy-free options.

'All Jains won't eat eggs. A lot of colleges just won't understand this. A lot of my friends just lie and say they have an egg allergy. There is no other way of explaining it to the kitchen.'

Issues with inadequate provision for vegetarians and vegans or inappropriate vegetarian options was an issue that cross-cut a number of religion or belief groups, and is likely also to be of relevance to numbers of staff and students who do not identify with any specific religion or belief group. Respondents to the survey raised issues such as the poor range of vegetarian options, lack of vegan food, lack of raw food, mixing of food-preparation utensils, and the presentation of vegetarian and meat dishes on the same plate. These issues were raised by both those whose religion or belief position led them to a vegan or vegetarian diet and those who on other grounds sought to utilise vegetarian options as an alternative to meat which was prepared in ways with which they were not comfortable.

In HEIs where there is a tradition of communal eating, dietary provision for both staff and students can be an issue if a wide range of suitable dietary options is not made available. In ancient collegiate HEIs, for example, there is often an expectation that students eat communally in the colleges. The extent of this varies from college to college; for some this is a nightly occurrence and for others a weekly one. For some students, notably international students and those from certain religion or belief groups, the



expectation around communal eating can be very challenging. Data collected during the study indicated that Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh staff and students regularly experience times when dietary provision is unsuitable.

'I don't think this is something we should have to fight for. It should be something we should get. It's easy enough to get vegetarian food, vegan food, dairy free. Why not halal? It's just one other option.'

For Hindus, dietary requirements can also make some social occasions difficult. Most social events provide a number of meat options, but where there is beef and no meat alternative to this, it can provide difficulties and result in the student or staff member having to opt for the vegetarian option when they would have preferred a non-beef meat alternative (if they are a member of a Hindu community that eats meat).

For some individuals and organisations, there is a tension between the provision of halal products and their own religious obligations and/or perceptions of what are humane methods for the slaughter of animals, or preferences in relation to organically produced meat. Where meat is organic and stunned prior to slaughter, this may be seen as being compliant with university policy on ethically produced food. In some HEIs, however, there is evidence that there have been campaigns by some students to have halal meat banned on the grounds that it is inhumane.

The survey provided the opportunity for people to comment only on their own dietary requirements, not on the requirements of others. The National Federation of Atheist, Humanist and Secular Student Societies has argued that there should have been more opportunity for respondents to state whether the religious views or beliefs of others impinge on their own sensibilities, for example by expressing the view that HEIs or students' unions should not serve unstunned meat, or that it should not provide exclusive space for religious groups. External groups such as the RSPCA (2011), the British Veterinary Association (undated) and the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC, 2003) have also expressed their concern with the practice of unstunned meat.

**‘I don’t think this is something we should have to fight for. It should be something we should get.’**

It is clear that the issue of unstunned meat is concerning for some staff and students in higher education. This issue may benefit from careful and inclusive dialogue across religion and belief groups and institutional providers in order to find the most inclusive solutions.

Staff and students found a range of creative ways around the issue of lack of provision for their dietary needs. Survey respondents set out a range of different strategies, including bringing their own food onto campus, assembling meals out of ingredients that are on sale on campus, using local restaurants, shops and takeaways, and taking vegetarian options where there was no alternative. In some cases, student or community organisations such as UJS Hillel ([www.ujshillel.co.uk](http://www.ujshillel.co.uk)) work to provide dietary options for students on campus beyond those provided by HEIs or students’ unions.

Staff and students indicated that clear labelling of food products would help them to make an informed choice. A number indicated that labelling of meat products to indicate origins, content and method of slaughter would serve to inform consumers and support choice.

‘We should be provided with more information regarding ingredients, for example some products contain alcohol and this is not listed, or most university-created food items only contain basic ingredients lists.’

‘I would like the meals on sale to be labelled clearly whether they contain beef and beef or meat products.’

However, the approach to labelling that is taken needs to be considered carefully. The recent campaign by Shechita UK (2011) against the EU food-labelling bill argues that labelling could cause certain approaches, such as stunning animals, to be seen as discriminatory by those whose approach to animal slaughter does not involve stunning. This is clearly a contentious issue and one which the higher education sector should approach carefully. Nonetheless, such issues are also part of much broader issues (such as nutritional matters) related to information about, and labelling of, food.

The provision of food to meet a wide range of requirements is fundamental to staff and students' experience. Food is an important element of social activity and, where full choice is offered, individuals' experiences will be improved through better opportunities to mix and create networks with others. Institutions may wish to consider ways of coordinating their food offer across the organisation, including both student and staff catering facilities.

Can food be labelled more appropriately to enable people with religion or belief to make more informed decisions about what they eat?

How far do your HEI's catering arrangements meet the needs of students and staff, given the diversity of dietary requirements?

## 2.4 Alcohol

The consumption of alcohol is often seen as a key component of student culture in the UK. Research in this area has tended to come from a public health perspective (Webb et al, 1996; Gill, 2002; Bewick et al, 2008), and there has been little exploration of how the social position of alcohol affects those who do not drink (perhaps for reasons of religion or belief). This section considers how alcohol use affects the experience of staff and students; however, the intersection between the drinking of alcohol and religion or belief is a much bigger issue for students.

The transition to higher education offers young people opportunities to engage in relatively unregulated social activities and to experiment with new experiences. For many, this experimentation takes the form of participation in alcohol-centred student events. Students who do not wish to partake in this 'excessive drinking culture' are likely to experience considerable difficulty (Piacentini and Banister 2006, 2009). This is particularly true for some groups of students whose attitudes towards alcohol consumption are defined by their religion or belief. In some cases, this can limit their ability to participate in a wide variety of activities and may leave them feeling isolated. The

wide use of alcohol is a problem for student respondents from a range of religion and belief groups, including Muslims, Hindus and some Christians.

Alcohol is consumed during a wide range of formal and informal university activities, including formal dinners, cheese and wine receptions, social events, freshers' activities, students' union activities, and socially among groups of students. Some HEIs have taken the decision to limit alcohol consumption on campus. However, this raises issues about the legitimate limits of institutional authority and what the appropriate role is for institutions in policing 'desirable' behaviours.

### **2.4.1 Integration into university life**

Freshers' week activities allow new students – many of whom are away from home for the first time – to make friends and settle in their new environment. Some student participants in the study related stories of feeling isolated at particular times, such as during freshers' week. This was usually centred around dietary needs and the extent to which students were presented with a large number of alcohol-related activities, with only a limited range of social activities that did not involve the use of alcohol.

The transition into a UK HEI is often particularly challenging for international students, many of whom do not consume alcohol for cultural reasons. The general acceptance of the consumption of alcohol can be a barrier to integration.

'It has affected my social life. In Malaysia the tradition is not to get drunk and this has been part of the foundation of my belief system. I have had to make friends with people who have a similar value set.'

The organisers of some students' union freshers' weeks have developed a range of alcohol-free activities to meet the needs of those students who are not comfortable with alcohol use. These include events such as trips to local museums, shops, cultural activities and walks around the city. However, such activities only work where there are sufficient numbers of students. There is also a danger that such events serve to ghettoize those students who do not drink alcohol and separate them from the main student body. One Muslim student explained that, in his university, non-

**'My tutor said: come and have a whisky. When you say you don't drink whisky, they don't quite understand.'**

alcoholic events would not attract large numbers of participants and therefore would defeat the object of a social event.

'I don't want it to be a non-alcoholic event and only I turn up. For some people, alcohol is the way they relax. If there was a non-alcoholic event, no-one would turn up. If you could have a non-alcoholic event that people would come to, then that would be great.'

For many students with a religious affiliation who do not drink alcohol, a student religious society can provide a valuable source of friends and sociability. However, this can also reinforce the separateness of religious students and lead to a stereotypical view of their unwillingness to mix. One student in a collegiate university told us:

'Each college doesn't have many Muslims, and we need to meet students from different colleges. It takes you out of the college. You are chatting less with the people in your college. The whole year knows each other but they don't know you because you don't go to their entertainment events. It is difficult to socialise. Some people think Muslims are quite insular. It's not that we don't want to socialise. We would love to. I don't feel comfortable in these situations.'

Students' unions and their associated societies are an important element in the social experiences of new students. However, the study revealed the equally important role that chaplaincies play in facilitating social events for both students and staff. Some chaplains regularly include welcome activities for students, and explained that some of these include the provision of alcohol. In these cases, the emphasis was on responsible use of alcohol. Chaplains and some student societies also provide a range of events where alcohol is not provided, such as film evenings, quizzes and café-style events.

Students' unions are democratic institutions that seek to meet the needs and requirements of their membership, which can entail difficult decision-making. In addition to their role as democratic institutions, students' unions have to ensure that, in the overall balance of their activities, they do not lose money. The sale of alcohol is an important income-generating aspect of their business, and a reduction in the provision of alcohol might

affect their ability to provide other activities. The social needs of the majority are frequently well addressed through a range of provision. Minority needs may be more difficult to address, both because of this democratic structure and because they are less easy to deal with in a financially profitable way.

Should the students' union and institution routinely provide non-alcoholic options in the programme at freshers' events?

### 2.4.2 Ongoing use of alcohol

For some students, involvement in activities where alcohol is present in the room is difficult, and they regularly decline invitations to avoid being put in this situation. Most see this as a personal choice and make exceptions for formal occasions. One Muslim student told us that they had overcome their objection to the presence of alcohol on a number of occasions where alcohol was associated with events related to their studies, such as subject dinners. This is a compromise and a personal choice.

'I went along to my subject dinner even though there was alcohol. It's part of the programme. It's difficult to deal with from the legal [Islamic law] perspective. I make some exceptions and go every now and then. I haven't really tried to tell them because I don't think they are going to understand.'

There is an assumption in some HEIs, and by some academics, that students will be happy to drink alcohol. One Jain student in a collegiate university explained that regular invitations were given to discuss academic issues in one-to-one tutorial settings over a glass of whisky. The student found this very difficult to address with the tutor involved:

'My tutor said: come and have a whisky. When you say you don't drink whisky, they don't quite understand. They don't follow through. I have had to say "am I not invited then?"'

Some students simply excluded themselves from social activities without an explanation. A Muslim student told us:

'My college is a posh college full of traditional English people. They haven't really had much interaction with very religious people except perhaps through their parents. If I sent them an email saying I couldn't come because I didn't drink alcohol they would think it was pretty strange. They would think: this guy is obviously weird!'

The use of alcohol at events involving staff can be a problem for some staff who are members of religion or belief groups. HEIs offer a number of social, academic and networking events that are often associated with alcohol, such as cheese and wine evenings, Christmas celebrations and drinks receptions. This can be an issue for many who come from a religious and/or cultural background in which one abstains from alcohol, but particularly for Muslim staff. Where this is the case, there is a perception that not attending such events might be potentially harmful to career progression as it removes a valuable networking opportunity.

### **2.4.3 Limiting alcohol consumption**

Some HEIs have taken measures to reduce the availability and consumption of alcohol, for a variety of reasons. Data gathered during the research indicated that there were both advantages and disadvantages to be gained by developing an alcohol-free approach.

In some cases, a move to an alcohol-free campus serves to drive students off the campus and into towns and city centres. However, the decision to create an alcohol-free campus also provides opportunities to rethink the use of social space. Staff at one alcohol-free campus explained that the students' union bar has been redeployed for use as a coffee bar and is used to hold a range of activities, such as a language cafe where students come together to develop language skills. The university has also witnessed the growth in popularity of non-alcohol-based events.

'It became apparent through feedback that there was need for alcohol-free social activities. We put on tea and coffee events. At first this was only attended by a handful of students. We have had to move to a large hall. We now offer tea, coffee and juice to up to 70 students. They play snooker and other games. It's very popular.'

The institution does not promote its alcohol-free status in an overt way. However, staff at the institution discussed the fact that

international students had highlighted the alcohol-free status of the institution positively in student surveys.

Not all HEIs experience such a positive reaction to the limitation of alcohol. Tensions can arise between university management and students' unions. In one university, management had chosen to limit alcohol, so prevented the students' union from creating a wine appreciation society and a beer and ale society. A students' union representative said that the students' union was not happy with this and felt that the university holds onto the implicit threat of closing the bar altogether in order to ensure compliance.

Should your HEI review the place of alcohol within the institution?

Is there value in providing alcohol-free alternatives that engage students and staff from all religion or belief groups?



## 2.5 Summary

Equality legislation underpins public bodies' approaches to the provision of goods, services and education, and should ensure that all individuals, including those with a religion or belief stance, feel fully able to access and participate in HEIs.

This study suggests:

- = there is relatively little data-gathering in relation to religion or belief
- = there is a willingness across the sector to support a greater degree of data-gathering in relation to religion or belief
- = data collection and consultation are important components in developing appropriate religion or belief-sensitive provision
- = some religion or belief groups are more likely than others to feel unable to access the full range of activities offered by HEIs
- = most student respondents are satisfied with the content and teaching of their courses; however, those from some religion or belief groups are more likely to feel that course content and teaching are not sensitive to their religion or belief
- = some staff respondents do not feel equipped to deal with religion or belief issues when they intersect with the curriculum
- = most staff and student respondents have no dietary requirements related to religion or belief and are satisfied with provision at their institution; however, for those who do have religion or belief-specific dietary requirements, unclear labelling and lack of alternative food options can be issues
- = the dominance of alcohol as part of the student experience can be a barrier to participation by some from religion or belief groups

### 3 Religious observance

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Many members of religion or belief groups may wish to observe a range of customs, rules or disciplines that are determined by the doctrines of their faith and/or their particular interpretation of it. These can range from performing acts of worship, prayer or celebration to the wearing of symbols or maintaining codes of dress.

These kinds of observance can come into tension with, for example, the allocation of resources, the development of the academic cycle of teaching, learning and assessment, and the need to maintain legislative requirements. A range of case study examples and scenarios that identify issues to consider, a variety of models for response, and resources to inform further consideration are set out in *Religious literacy leadership in higher education – leadership challenges: case studies document* (Dinham and Jones, 2010).

An equal society as defined by the Equalities Review (2007) recognises people's different needs, situations and goals, and removes the barriers that limit what people can do and can be, including the right to identity, expression and self-respect, and freedom of religion or belief. The extent to which HEIs manage their competing priorities in order to facilitate individuals' ability to exercise their right to self-expression through the maintenance of their religious observance is considered in this chapter.

Religion or belief is an integral part of the lives of many of those who work and study in UK higher education. In addition to legislative requirements around equality, many participants in this study argued that, if participation in higher education prevents an individual from observing their religion or belief, it is likely to have a negative impact on their overall experience. An equality and diversity practitioner in a case study university put this succinctly, arguing:

'If you ask someone to close off what is an essential part of themselves they are not going to be able to perform in the same way.'

### 3.1 Prayer, worship, meditation and celebration

Institutions are seeking to accommodate a wide range of practices both within and between religion or belief groups with varying levels of understanding and success. This section explores the issues and tensions associated with the interaction between religious observance, through prayer, worship, meditation and celebration, and institutional practices and policies.

#### 3.1.1 The institutional calendar, timetabling and examinations

HEIs work to a range of business, financial and academic cycles that do not always align with individuals' needs for religious observance. However, many institutions have sought ways to facilitate individuals in their religious observance. The legislative requirements of the Equality Act 2006 were a key driver for this.

Most HEIs are organised around trimesters or semesters that are aligned to the western Christian (Gregorian) calendar for observance of the festivals of Christmas and Easter, which are reflected in the calendar in general public use in the UK. While other major religious festivals are often acknowledged, students and staff need to make special provision for taking time off for the observance of non-Christian religious festivals. This can lead some individuals to feel compromised. Some students may experience difficulties in settling into university life as a new student because of a clash between the need to observe certain festivals and the start date of a university term, semester and/or course.

'My first day of lectures was on Yom Kippur, which is the Day of Atonement and a most holy day for Jews. The day for moving into the halls was on Rosh Hashanah – Jewish new year. I am not a very religious person apart from the two days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. These are the three days when I come out of the woodwork and go to synagogue and I pray. Last year because it was the first year of university I had to come to university early but my first day of lectures I was caught between a rock and a hard place. Do I go to university or go to synagogue like I have for the last 18 years? It just didn't feel right.'

It is worth noting that alignment with the western Christian (Gregorian) calendar as a basis of organising the academic year leaves some students and staff feeling both compromised and

disadvantaged. An individual's religion or belief can introduce ongoing tensions between the need to maintain religious observance and the need to meet the requirements of academic courses or other organisational, cultural or management requirements. Previous work by ECU (2009a) has recommended that HEIs consult faith calendars as well as engaging with staff and students to ensure the needs of different religion and belief groups are considered in examination schedules and timetables.

The timetabling of lectures and examinations on particular days of the week especially affects some religion or belief groups. For example, Muslim and Jewish staff and students indicated that they sometimes have issues with events arranged on Fridays (the main day for Muslim congregational prayers) and Friday late afternoons/evenings and Saturdays (the Jewish Sabbath, during which work should not be done). HEIs have made a number of different responses to these requirements. Some HEIs provide calendars of religious festivals to those responsible for timetabling and examinations. In one institution, the equality and diversity practitioner provides information about religious holidays and festivals in order to help with the scheduling of exams.

In one HEI, when students are unable to attend an exam for reasons of religion or belief, students are supervised by an academic or religious person until they are able to sit the exam. The language used to describe this process is extreme and has a sense of being a punitive measure. A Jewish academic explained:

'If you can't sit an exam because of Shabbat or Shavuot and you can't do it on that particular day, then we will identify somebody who will literally lock you away during the time when you should have been sitting your exam. They release you in order to do the exam. Here we call it incarceration – it's very extreme!'

The research has revealed that there is often a lack of consistency in the way staff deal with students' religion or belief requirements.

**‘It is about being culturally sensitive to all in the room’**

‘When it comes to students, the academic timetable does not account for religion at all. If you get the right programme leader you might be OK. It’s down to their understanding and cultural awareness. There is no consistency within the institution; it actually comes down to the programme leader themselves.’

Inconsistency in the way in which guidance is applied regarding tensions between timetabling and the requirements for religious observance has the potential to undermine an individual’s ability to express their religion or belief identity. It is worth noting that in 2015 and 2016 the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan will fall during the traditional exam period. Institutions could benefit from proactively reviewing their current policy and procedures relating to exam timetabling in order to ensure that when students wish to maintain their religious observance, they are not disadvantaged academically because of it.

In some HEIs, there is awareness that religious observance can affect the ability of individuals to participate in their course and in the wider university experience. This is particularly the case for students who undertake fasting as part of their religious observance. However, awareness is not always translated into practical accommodation. Some staff argued that timetabling to accommodate different observances is not practical. However, other staff suggested that there would be value in developing increased cultural awareness as part of a process of addressing these issues.

‘If you are going to be fasting for a whole month, your sleeping patterns are going to be altered; your meal times are going to change. But how do you make an academic timetable that is going to suit all students and count all minorities? It is about being culturally sensitive to all in the room. We need to make sure that academics have knowledge but also that they know what to do with that knowledge. It is quite easy to make statements about ‘being aware’, but what does that mean for them in terms of grading, and timetabling etc, so we could do better in terms of preparing staff and telling them what that means.’

However, moves towards greater public recognition and accommodation of religious observance are not welcomed by everyone. Some students may find public observation of religion challenging.

‘The officers of ‘blind faith’ religious organisations are central within the university and I am intimidated by their open presence. A priest attempted to bless me along with others on the entrance to first year exams. It really upset me and I found it difficult to concentrate during the exams.’

When planning the academic timetable, in what ways can your institution accommodate individuals’ requirements for religious observance?

Is the institution prepared for the fact that in 2015 and 2016 the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan will fall during the traditional exam period? Would any changes in policy or practice have wider implications for other religion or belief groups?

#### **3.1.2 Institutional endorsement of religion or belief**

A number of institutions (including those without an official church-related and/or Christian-informed institutional identity) include some elements of prayer and worship in certain institutional activities (such as graduation and other formal occasions). Some participants raised concerns where there is either an expectation or a perceived expectation that all staff and students attend and are seen to support these celebrations.

Some HEIs use university chapels or buildings with a religious connection for examination purposes because they offer large spaces that can accommodate many students, and are cost-effective and readily available. There are mixed views about how appropriate these facilities are for examinations. In some HEIs the use of such accommodation elicited few or no complaints; however, this is not the case in all institutions.

A related issue is the inclusion of symbols with Christian associations in the crests, logos and imagery employed by institutions, which may be due to historical connections. One HEI has recently taken the decision to remove these kinds of religious elements from university symbols on its degree certificates, though this is only one possible approach.

Christian religious observance is built into the formal and/or informal structures of some institutions. In these institutions, a number of formal events, such as graduation ceremonies, include

**‘As an atheist I am told to go to religious ceremonies and I feel compromised by the compulsion’**

elements of Christian religious observance. Some individuals are uncomfortable with the combination of formal institutional processes and religious observance. This is particularly the case for atheists and those with no religion or belief.

Many graduation ceremonies and some other institutional events have some religious content, such as saying prayers and singing hymns. This is particularly, but not exclusively, the case for church-related or Christian-informed HEIs. There are differences in opinion about the significance and perceived impact on participants of prayer in comparison with the singing of hymns. However, there is evidence that both forms of observance – when participation in them was assumed – are difficult to accept for some members of non-Christian religion or belief groups. At a church-related or Christian-informed HEI, one chaplain, when describing the graduation ceremony at the local cathedral, explained:

‘The reality is that it should be a ceremony but [a member of the senior management team] insisted that we have a hymn. I have complained that this is inappropriate. This is a ceremony and not a service. If it was a service, it should be described as such.’

Staff and students of many religion or belief backgrounds can feel compromised when there is an expectation that they attend ceremonies that include a specific religious element.

‘As an atheist I am told to go to religious ceremonies and I feel compromised by the compulsion.’

A students’ union representative explained that – although many students are uncomfortable with the religious nature of some of their institution’s ceremonies – they still want to attend and be part of their institution. This is particularly the case with the graduation ceremony.

In one institution, an equal opportunities practitioner explained that there are difficulties in raising an issue about the requirement to attend events containing Christian religious observance with senior managers, as this could be viewed as an unacceptable challenge to the ethos of the institution. In ancient collegiate HEIs, the issue can be compounded by acts of religious observance that are traditionally incorporated into daily

activities, such as formal dining. In one institution it was reported that the act of saying grace before meals can be problematic for staff from some religion or belief groups, and in particular for those of no religion. In some colleges, staff are expected to take it in turns to perform this ritual and staff from non-Christian backgrounds have to opt out.

'Fewer scholars have been volunteering to say grace each evening. You have to opt out of the scheme to say grace and this puts you on the defensive.'

Under what circumstances is it appropriate for the institution to use religious buildings? How do staff and students of different religions or beliefs feel about this decision?

If your institution is church-related or Christian faith-informed, how far does it expect staff and students to participate in religious elements of institutional activities? How does the institution communicate these expectations?

How far are acts of worship integrated into institutional business? How does the institution accommodate individuals who do not share the institutional religion or belief position?

#### 3.1.3 Facilities for worship

The spaces that HEIs provide for prayer, meditation and worship fall into three broad categories:

- = single-faith spaces that are provided solely for members of a single religion or belief group
- = multi-faith or inter-faith spaces that are used at different times by different religion or belief groups
- = multi-faith or inter-faith spaces that bring together groups of people of different religions or beliefs for the purposes of shared activities

The Church of England-sponsored Faiths in higher education chaplaincy project noted that, although multi-faith was not a widely used term in higher education, 95% of chaplaincies had prayer space and, of those, 51% reported having chapels and 65% Muslim prayer spaces (Clines, 2008: 5). HEIs often have a



**‘It irks me that some religions are catered for and others aren’t. How is this equal? Why have certain religions been placed above others?’**

single-faith space, generally a chapel or a Muslim prayer room. This study found that while chapels are used mainly for Christian worship, on occasion they are used to accommodate other groups’ activities, including for worship and prayer.

Within the religion and society research programme of the AHRC and ESRC, a research project is being conducted from the University of Manchester on Multi-faith spaces: symptoms and agents of religious and social change, which examines multi-faith spaces that have developed within HEIs as part of its broader focus ([www.manchester.ac.uk/mfs](http://www.manchester.ac.uk/mfs)).

The majority of institutions provide some facilities for worship, celebration or meditation. 53.7% of student respondents and 74.9% of staff respondents confirm this.

The survey provided an opportunity for those who do not use university facilities for religion or belief to record comments. Some individuals with no religion felt that public or university funds should not be used to provide for religious groups:

‘At a time of scarce resource it is especially quite wrong that public funds should be assigned to people’s private religious/ethical practices.’

However, such objections to the resourcing of worship space were rare, even though only a minority of students (17.4%) and staff (14.9%) indicated that they use the facilities provided by their institution. Muslim staff (53.3%) and students (62.9%) are the most likely group to use these facilities. This is unsurprising given the requirements for daily prayer observance for some Muslims.

The survey responses indicated that there are tensions in some organisations regarding provision of prayer space for Muslims. A number of responses indicate that, where provision is made solely for Muslim prayer, other groups can resent what seems like an inequality.

‘It irks me that some religions are catered for and others aren’t. There is a prayer room, for Muslims only. What about Christians, Jews, Buddhists etc? How is this equal? Why have certain religions been placed above others?’

Many HEIs either have, or are moving towards, the provision of a multi-faith space to meet the needs of a variety of religion or belief groups while facilitating meditation, worship or prayer as separate groups. However, some tensions were noted between different religious groups regarding the use of such multi-faith space. This is because the sharing of space raised both logistical and religious/theological issues. There is also the issue of how far the multi-faith terminology facilitates the engagement of those individuals and groups with belief positions that would not normally be regarded as faiths.

Some participants in the study felt that people are more engaged by single-faith spaces than multi-faith spaces. This seems particularly to be the case for some Muslim students. Participants cited incidents where single-faith spaces had been converted to multi-faith spaces without consultation with the individuals and/or groups involved. While a multi-faith approach might meet institutional understandings of requirements for inclusivity, if such initiatives are undertaken without proper consultation they can engender a feeling that certain groups are being disadvantaged. One Muslim student explained:

'Sometimes an Islamic single-faith space can be changed to a multi-faith space without consultation. You come back after holidays and things have been changed. It feels like a smack in the face!'

In some instances a multi-faith space has been – or is perceived to have been – 'taken over' by one group. This can cause a problem because it can limit use by other groups. Some participants argued that an active chaplaincy could play a role in overcoming or addressing these issues.

The geographical arrangement of an institution affects its ability to provide suitable space for prayer, meditation or quiet contemplation. One multi-faith space would not accommodate the needs of students and staff across multiple campuses due to the time required to travel from different parts of the university to one central space. In these situations, some institutions have designated certain areas as 'quiet rooms' set aside for use by all students and staff.

A number of HEIs have taken the decision not to provide any specifically designated space for groups to meet for religion or

belief purposes. Instead, they have moved the responsibility for securing space for prayer or worship to individuals and religion or belief groups themselves. There can be practical difficulties associated with such an approach, as the allocated rooms will often be different each week, and students have to make an effort to identify the room each time they wish to participate rather than having a single focus for their observances. In one institution, Muslim students explained that sometimes the rooms allocated are not an appropriate size for worship and that, on a number of occasions, this has resulted in students having to pray in corridors.

Some institutions have developed a policy on the booking and allocation of quiet rooms for a variety of purposes, including for prayer, meditation and contemplation. This policy ensures that, where students and staff cannot access more formal spaces for this purpose, there is a clearly articulated and communicated procedure for booking and allocating space to meet their needs. HEIs may wish to consider this as an example of useful practice.

Responses to the surveys indicated that there are issues about how the provision of faith space and the associated activities are promoted. While some institutions have deliberate and well articulated policies on promoting or signposting religion or belief space, this is not the case for all. The survey responses indicated that some members of some HEIs had not been aware of the facilities and had discovered the multi-faith space by chance.

What provision does your institution make available for worship, meditation, prayer and celebration space? How is this space allocated and how are priorities decided between different groups?

How is information about institutional facilities for worship, meditation, prayer and celebration communicated to new staff and students?

### 3.1.4 Religion or belief associations and societies

Most students' unions provide a range of clubs or societies related to specific religion or belief groups, along with others that could have a religious or faith-based inspiration and/or element, such as a pro-life society. In addition, the fieldwork revealed that a number of chaplains also provide opportunities for groups to come together through multi- or inter-faith activities such as discussion groups, lectures and debating societies, or single-issue activities such as Fair Trade Fortnight.

26.8% of students (3897 respondents) are a member of a religion or belief society or group in their institution, whereas only 11.0% of staff (3064 respondents) are. Jewish students (62.7% of Jewish student respondents to the survey) and Muslim staff (22.2% of Muslim staff respondents to the survey) are most likely to be members of university societies related to religion or belief. Tables 3.1 and 3.2 indicate staff and student membership of religion or belief-related HEI groups by religion or belief.

**Table 3.1 Number of staff who are members of religion or belief-related HEI societies by religion or belief**

	Number	Percentage*
Muslim	20	22.2
Buddhist	9	22.0
Christian	238	16.5
Hindu	7	13.2
Other	8	12.5
Jewish	4	10.3
Sikh	3	10.3
Pagan	4	9.0
Spiritual	7	5.1
No religion	34	3.0
Uncodable	2	15.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>336</b>	

\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question

**Table 3.2 Number of students who are members of religion or belief-related university societies by religion or belief**

	Number	Percentage*
Jewish	47	62.7
Muslim	171	48.0
Sikh	16	44.4
Christian	607	35.2
Other	24	34.3
Hindu	26	33.8
Buddhist	18	23.0
Pagan	13	16.5
Spiritual	20	10.7
No religion	102	8.2
Uncodable	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1044</b>	

\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question

### 3.1.5 Celebrating religious festivals and holy days

In common with the public holiday system of the wider UK society, the western Christian (Gregorian) calendar is the basis around which most HEIs organise their academic year. This can reinforce a perception that HEIs are more accommodating towards western Christians than towards members of other religious groups, as this structure provides adequate time for these Christians to accommodate their religious observances but may leave other religion or belief group members (including Orthodox Christians, whose religious calendar is different and who can therefore also have major religious festivals on days that are not HEI holidays) feeling at a disadvantage.

The research revealed that many HEIs provide a range of celebratory events. An annual carol service, for example, was common to many. Some HEIs have also made a concerted effort to recognise other religious festivals through providing activities such as themed menus, social events and celebrations aimed at raising the profile of a range of religious festivals. However, HEIs are often selective about which festivals they profile, and this can lead to members of minority religion or belief groups feeling that their festivals go unrecognised.

While some HEIs do not profile any religion or belief-related festivals, they do have policies that allow members of some religion or belief groups to take leave from work or study to celebrate such festivals. Sometimes, however, these policies are not always applied equally and can be down to individual interpretation about what festivals and celebrations are important or necessary. During fieldwork visits, concern was expressed that the different religious festivals are not treated equally.

'Diwali is a religious festival, but because it is a festival of light people don't see it as a faith-based festival, it wouldn't be recognised on a par with Eid, for example, for which holidays are allowed by the university. If this is happening with one of the bigger festivals I can't imagine what happens for the smaller festivals and denominations.'

Some institutions provide access to guidance materials to support staff in dealing with these issues. One HEI provides a handbook for all staff and students, which highlights religious and cultural events, national celebrations and volunteering activities. Access to information of this type can support staff and students to participate in religious observance and can also be useful in supporting strategic and planning decisions relating to timetabling, examination planning and the development of an institution's social events calendar. Institutions may wish to review their policies and approaches to providing information and communicating expectations about the need to accommodate staff and student needs regarding the celebration of religious festivals.

Recognising the needs of groups to celebrate religion or belief festivals is an important way in which staff and students can enjoy a more inclusive environment in which to work and study. For some, however, overt celebration of religious festivals is not seen as either a necessary, desirable or appropriate part of the public life of an educational establishment, and there can be a feeling among some groups that institutions should not have to take any responsibility in relation to this. During the fieldwork, one Muslim student explained that, despite the importance of his prayer and religious holidays, there was an understanding that members of his religion would need to find ways of accommodating their requirements by meeting together

in small groups during the day to find time to pray. If this was not possible, then prayer in the evenings was acceptable.

What religion or belief occasions does your institution celebrate/mark? How have these celebrations been chosen and have any religion or belief positions been left out?

## 3.2 Religious dress and symbols

Many members of religion or belief groups wear symbols or maintain codes of dress dictated by religious observance. This section explores the experiences of staff and students in observing these requirements, and looks at how these requirements may at times conflict with various university policies, for example around health and safety and security.

### 3.2.1 Dress requirements

10% of students and 3.7% of staff identified that their religion or belief required them to wear specific dress or symbols. The majority of those who indicated that they have dress requirements are Muslim, Sikh and Jewish respondents. Members of staff and students feel that the campus is, in general, a place where individuals feel comfortable wearing symbols and religious dress. 85.6% of staff (118 respondents) indicated that they were able to fulfil their dress requirements without difficulty, and 79.3% of students (431 respondents) feel this to be the case. A greater proportion of female staff (92.4%) and students (81.5%) feel able to fulfil their dress requirements compared with male members of staff (77.1%) and students (76.9%).

In Northern Ireland, dress or symbols that associate individuals with a particular religion or belief group are regulated. One institution has implemented staff dress codes that forbid the wearing of any garment, including football shirts, which might indicate an association with a communal/religious group. In the case of dress or symbols associated with other minority religion or belief groups, this was not seen to be an issue, and the dress code raised no specific issues about wearing other garments associated with minority religions. One staff member explained:

‘The wearing of the veil however would not be seen as an issue. Only those items of clothing which relate to sectarianism are considered a problem.’

**‘On one hand we respect diversity, but on the other hand there is a minority of staff who think that religious dress should not be accepted if people wish to work and study here’**

Most institutions had an implicit requirement that clothing should not cause offence to others, but there was little direction as to precisely what to wear or what was not acceptable.

‘Staff dress code is not explicit but your contract expects you to be attired in a respectful way which allows you to perform your job.’

The lack of explicit policies or codes relating to dress requirements can lead to misunderstandings and concerns by academic staff about what dress is appropriate and what guidance to provide. One equality and diversity practitioner explained that this was a concern raised regularly during staff equality and diversity training, and one that regularly revealed deeply held views which were hard to manage.

‘Most frequently, issues about the niqab or hijab and the need to provide a service to students where they have a barrier to communication are raised. On one hand we respect diversity, but on the other hand there is a minority of staff who think that religious dress should not be accepted if people wish to work and study here. It is hard to manage. It is a challenge.’

At some ancient collegiate universities, dress codes exist for both staff and students relating to certain ceremonies and activities – for example the requirement to wear specific academic clothing for examinations and degree ceremonies. This usually extends to all students with the exception of those wearing Christian clerical dress. The expectation is that students wear academic dress over their own clothing. If a woman chose to veil herself, she would be expected to wear a black veil in accordance with the dress code for wearing black garb, and to wear academic dress over her own choice of clothing. A senior academic explained:

‘We allow the wearing of dog collars and we would probably allow Sikhs to wear turbans but we would be uncomfortable about any other forms of religious dress. I think this is quite wrong. These ceremonies are not religious. We should all have to wear academic gowns and dress.’

When there is an institutional expectation about wearing particular kinds of dress, policies that communicate an expectation about dress requirements are helpful in addressing deeply held views and prejudices. They also provide useful



guidance to staff who are required to make judgments about what alternative approaches HEIs might make with regard to issues of religious dress.

The position expressed at a number of institutions was that the level of comfort that individuals feel in the wearing of dress or symbols is dependent on their strength of feeling and character.

### 3.2.2 Religious symbols

During the fieldwork, the majority of staff and students explained that they are comfortable identifying their religion or belief through the wearing of symbols or clothing. One equality and diversity practitioner explained that there have been no complaints about individuals feeling intimidated by others because they were wearing a religious symbol. In Northern Ireland there are ways of manifesting religion or belief, such as Catholics receiving ashes on Ash Wednesday, or by the newspapers that are read, or sporting links with Gaelic games. The wearing of Christian union hoodies and T-shirts is a regular occurrence across all of the institutions visited, and this is seen as perfectly acceptable.

The wearing of poppies for remembrance or commemoration purposes emerged on a number of occasions as an issue. The case study institution visited in Northern Ireland placed no limitations on Protestant staff who wish to wear poppies for Remembrance Day. This is not a position linked solely to the Protestant community, but is largely so. In another institution, a member of staff indicated that they choose to wear a white poppy to indicate pacifism related to their Quaker beliefs, and this is perfectly acceptable.

While the wearing of small, discreet religious symbols such as crucifixes raises little concern, certain symbols can create more of a reaction among work and study colleagues.

At one institution, a new international Sikh student attended a lecture at the start of the term wearing a large kirpan (ceremonial dagger), which resulted in the student being accosted for the possession of an offensive weapon and the police becoming involved. The student was distressed by the situation and failed to understand what had caused the unwelcome attention by the police. Through negotiation, the matter was ultimately

resolved and the student began wearing a smaller, more discreet symbol. In this instance, the outcome for the individual was a positive one. The university invited the student to make a presentation to other staff and students about his experiences. This ensured that members of the HEI community had their awareness raised concerning the tensions between the need for religious tolerance, compliance with equality legislation and the application of other legislative requirements.

One student respondent indicated that they had become very secretive about the use of a religious implement for fear that it would be confiscated as an offensive weapon. They explained:

'I worship in my own room in halls; however, we are not allowed candles or incense in the rooms, which makes this difficult. Apparently I could have my athame [a ceremonial dagger, with a double-edged blade which is a ritual implement used in the religion of Wicca] taken off me as it can be seen as dangerous... but a kitchen knife is far more so. My university doesn't know I have an athame and I really don't want it taken.'

In another institution, Pagan staff explained that while they are comfortable with chosen colleagues knowing about their religion, they are uncomfortable wearing pagan symbols or dress which other people might associate with popular perceptions about witchcraft. In part this is due to a dislike of having to be defensive or provide detailed explanations about their beliefs and ceremonies.

'[The pentacle] has so long been associated with Satanism due to Hammer Horror films that I tend not to mark myself out. I just don't want to get into it!'

#### **3.2.3 Health and safety issues**

A significant issue within higher education is the potential conflict between religion or belief dress requirements and health and safety requirements. Under the Employment (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, a dress code that requires employees to act in a way contrary to their religious beliefs risks being indirectly discriminatory. However, the ACAS (2005) guide to *Religion or belief and the workplace* makes it clear that any incidence of this kind of potential indirect discrimination can be justified on the basis of health and safety. The guide also makes

a number of best practice recommendations to ensure that an employee dress code is not discriminatory (ACAS, 2005).

While few issues emerged about the wearing of religious dress or symbols, concerns raised were often linked to the requirements to meet health and safety legislation. This is particularly the case for students who are studying medicine or programmes related to the health or caring professions. Health and safety laws generally override the requirements of religious observance, which can feel like discrimination for those who wish to wear religious dress or symbols. One fairly common issue relates to the requirements to uncover the forearms during certain elements of medicine or other health- and caring-related programmes of study. This is required in order to reduce the risks of transmission of infection. However, it can challenge the interpretations and consciences of some Muslim women who wish to keep their forearms covered.

'I have to be bare below the elbows in clinical areas, which does not adhere to my religious dress code.'

Survey responses indicate that the way in which health and safety requirements are handled is a cause for concern for some students. HEIs and other sectors, such as the NHS, are exploring alternative approaches to meeting both health requirements and religious observance requirements; some hospitals have introduced multi-faith gowns.

One equality and diversity practitioner described work that had recently been completed with the university medical school regarding the recruitment of students from diverse backgrounds to medical courses. They explained:

'The message was very clear that unless an individual raises an issue about religious dressing, this should not be an issue when recruiting.'

Does your institution provide clear guidance around religious dress codes? Do these address potential conflicts with health and safety requirements?

### 3.2.4 Systems for photographic and electronic identification

HEIs are increasingly moving towards electronic systems that can be used, among other things, for attendance monitoring, borrowing library resources and more generally confirming identity. While these systems can offer cost-effective solutions, they can also present challenges for members of some religion or belief groups.

It is now commonplace for both staff and students to have photographic identity cards, and in some institutions these are used to check the identity of students for examination purposes. For Muslim women who cover their face, the requirement to carry photographic ID is problematic; however, some HEIs have developed accommodating policies. In one HEI, Muslim women who choose to cover their face are required to hold two identity cards, one with a photograph (taken by a female member of staff) and one with their face covered. One equality and diversity practitioner noted that there are few occasions where there is a need for actual photographic identity. Where this is the case, for example at security checks or examination times, Muslim women are taken into a private room where a female member of staff identifies the women using their photographic identity card.

In one HEI, a chaplain had been invited, along with Muslim colleagues, to a consultation which asked specific questions about whether or not the installation of a biometric scanner system introduced any issues for individuals from religion or belief backgrounds. While the consultation process was limited to a narrow range of religion or belief groups, this example indicates that there is a high level of understanding by different departments in this HEI that its actions may have an impact on the religion or belief of its students.

'It was good that they felt the need to speak about it and they didn't just go and put a biometrics scanner in. They realised that there were cultural and ethical issues.'

Does your institution have a clear policy about the use of photographic identity cards? Should alternative procedures be put in place for those who wish to cover their face as part of their religious observance?

### 3.3 Summary

The study suggests:

- = most HEIs organise their academic year around the western Christian (Gregorian) calendar, which can restrict the ability of some students and staff to celebrate holy days and religious festivals associated with non-Christian religions and sometimes with Orthodox Christianity
- = there is a lack of consistency in the range of religion or belief celebrations that are recognised and facilitated by HEIs, which can leave some minority groups feeling undervalued
- = students may be forced to miss elements of their course if they wish to absent themselves in order to make religious observance
- = chaplains play an important role in supporting the religion or belief requirements of all staff and students, including facilitating inter-faith and multi-faith activity
- = staff and students value having space for prayer, meditation, contemplation and celebration; however, consideration needs to be given to how this space is allocated and managed to ensure equitable access for all religion or belief groups
- = many HEIs incorporate acts of worship within the fabric of mainstream activities such as graduation ceremonies, or host such events in religious buildings, which can be a source of anxiety or resentment when attendance is mandatory
- = religion or belief societies are valued particularly by substantial numbers of students, and by some staff, as an important part of their support network
- = a minority of respondents expressed a need to wear religious dress or symbols, which can raise issues in relation to certain programmes of study, such as medical or health-related disciplines, that have their own health and safety-derived dress codes
- = some HEIs require staff and students to have photographic identity cards, which can raise issues for some female Muslims who prefer to cover their face

## 4 Discrimination and harassment

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Previous research has shown little specific attention to the experience of religion or belief groups in relation to discrimination and harassment in the context of UK higher education.

This section explores these issues based on empirical data gathered through the online survey, institutional case studies and other methods employed by this project. Findings are intended to identify issues and highlight examples of practice but do not claim to be statistically representative of the sector.

It is important to recognise that discrimination and harassment are related, but not synonymous. While both are discussed in this chapter, where appropriate we deal with these as separate issues.

This is not a legal report and does not seek to discuss the legal definition of discrimination and harassment in relation to religion or belief. It is therefore important to recognise that incidences of discrimination or harassment need to be understood as perceived or reported experience.

How an individual experiences and understands discrimination and harassment is likely to be personal and subjective. However, participants were given some definitions to help them to understand what the researchers meant by these terms.

Discrimination would, for example, be a member of staff being overlooked for promotion due to their religion or belief. Harassment would, for example, be incidents of threatening emails due to someone's religion or belief, or graffiti targeted against a particular religion or belief.

It is also valuable to recognise that concepts of discrimination and harassment are contestable when applied to the area of religion or belief. Woodhead with Catto (2009) note the overlap that can exist between religion or belief and other equality strands such as ethnicity. There are also tensions of interpretation between legally enforceable actions against harassment and the human rights associated with freedom of speech. Many participants in this study argued that this tension was particularly relevant in the context of higher education, with its traditions of academic freedom and unfettered critical enquiry. This issue has been discussed earlier in this report in [Participation and access](#).

Participants in this study also highlighted tensions between different religion or belief groups; it is important to recognise that not all challenging interactions are appropriately or accurately viewed through the lens of discrimination or

harassment. Relationships and conflict between religious groups are complex for HEIs to manage; this will be discussed in [Good relations](#), as will the interface between religion or belief and other protected characteristics.

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## **4.1 Level of discrimination and harassment**

While the legal definitions of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion or belief are relatively clear, the interpretation of them by the courts and tribunals is still evolving, especially when considered vis-à-vis other protected characteristics. In the lived experience and interpretation of individuals, they are even more complex and contested. This section discusses participants' experience of higher education in terms of their general level of satisfaction and wellbeing within their institution, before moving on to look in detail at their perceptions of discrimination and harassment.

### **4.1.1 Feeling valued**

Whether individuals or not feel valued is not necessarily related to the incidence of discrimination and harassment in the institution where they work or study. However, some research has shown a link between perceived discrimination, job satisfaction and other measures of wellbeing and engagement (Ensher et al, 2001; Deitch et al, 2003; Holcomb-McCoy & Addison-Bradley, 2005). Discussion about feeling valued is therefore an important indicator of the general context of staff and student experiences within higher education.

The surveys indicate that the overwhelming majority of both staff (80.2%) and students (92.4%) either agree or strongly agree that their institution creates an environment where they feel valued and welcomed. There is no clear pattern in the religion or belief identities of those who did not indicate that they feel valued. A small majority of staff respondents (54.1%) were also positive about the value that institutions accorded to employees' religion or belief identities. The majority of staff (79.3%) and student (90.6%) respondents felt that the publicity materials and literature produced by their institutions reflect the diversity of staff and students.

### 4.1.2 Levels of discrimination and harassment

The research revealed relatively little evidence of incidents of direct discrimination or harassment on the grounds of religion or belief. Taken as a whole, the overwhelming majority of staff respondents (93.4%) answered that they had not been discriminated against or harassed because of their actual or perceived religion or belief identity since 2003. However, 151 staff responded that they had been harassed or discriminated against. Of these 151 individuals, a number indicated that they had experienced discrimination or harassment from more than one source.

**Table 4.1 Number of staff responses that indicate discrimination or harassment (since 2003) because of their actual or perceived religion or belief identity**

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes, by other university/college staff	60	1.9
Yes, by my immediate colleagues	59	1.9
Yes, by students	56	1.8
Yes, by visitors to the university/college	14	0.5
No	2904	93.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>3093</b>	<b>100.0</b>

This was a multiple-answer question. The total number of people who responded to this question was 3055. The total number of responses against all options was 3093. Percentages relate to the number of responses rather than to the number of responders.

Taken as a whole, the overwhelming majority of student respondents (93.9%) also indicated that they had not been discriminated against or harassed on grounds of religion or belief.

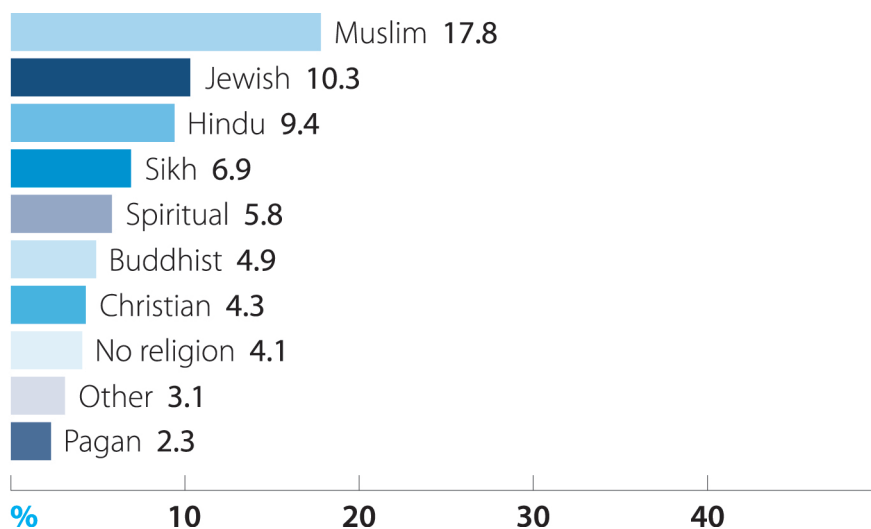
Tables 4.2 and 4.3 indicate respondents by religion or belief group who indicated that they felt discriminated against or harassed.



**Table 4.2 Staff respondents by religion or belief group who indicated that they felt discriminated against or harassed**

	Number	Percentage*
Muslim	16	17.8
Jewish	4	10.3
Hindu	5	9.4
Sikh	2	6.9
Spiritual	8	5.8
Buddhist	2	4.9
Christian	62	4.3
No religion	46	4.1
Other	2	3.1
Pagan	1	2.3
Uncodable	3	23.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>151</b>	

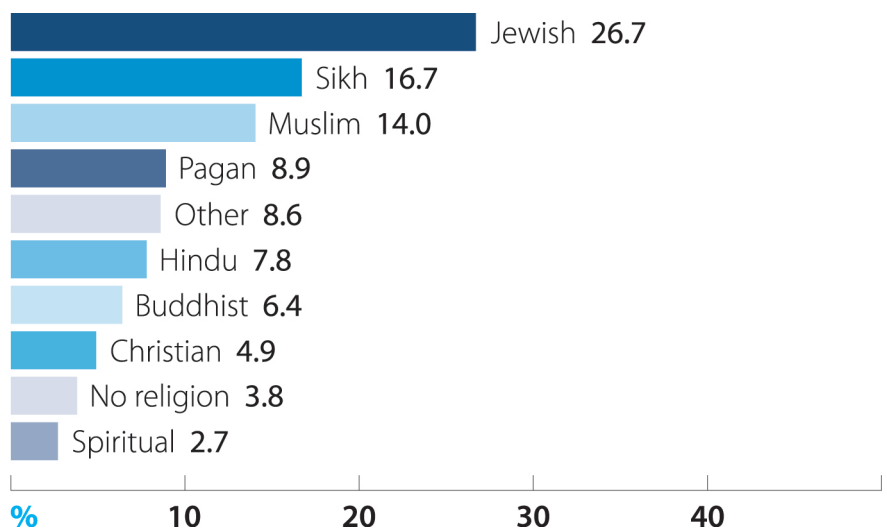
\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question



**Table 4.3 Student respondents by religion or belief group who indicated that they felt discriminated against or harassed**

	Number	Percentage*
Jewish	20	26.7
Sikh	6	16.7
Muslim	50	14.0
Pagan	7	8.9
Other	6	8.6
Hindu	6	7.8
Buddhist	5	6.4
Christian	84	4.9
No religion	48	3.8
Spiritual	5	2.7
Uncodable	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>	

\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question



This shows that there are some patterns based on who is reporting that they have experienced discrimination or harassment. Muslim staff, for example, are most likely to feel discriminated against or harassed, while around a quarter of Jewish students say that they have felt discriminated against or harassed. If extrapolated to a wider higher education population, this might indicate the possibility of quite high numbers of these particular categories of staff and students being affected. At the same time, direct extrapolation is not possible because of the sampling issues outlined at the beginning of this report. Nevertheless, the survey does provide some examples of the kinds of behaviour that respondents identified as discriminatory.

‘There was an incident earlier this term in which a poster with a picture of a bearded man was placed inside a lift. The poster had nothing to do with Islam or the Islamic society. Later that day, when we were in the lift, we saw that someone had written some very derogatory Islamophobic comment on the poster.’

‘When discussing the Holocaust as part of a theology module, I felt another student was being insensitive, as she told me I needed to get out of the ‘Jew-box’ when viewing the Holocaust.’

Such examples are suggestive that, while not an issue for the majority of staff and students, discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion or belief are of sufficient importance for HEIs to address if they wish to build inclusive institutions that release the potential of all staff and students and avoid the negative potential of legal cases.

Other research in this area also suggests that direct discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion or belief are issues that are experienced by a relatively small minority in higher education. A recent indicative survey on hate incidents by the National Union of Students (NUS, 2011) found that almost 3% of respondents had experienced a hate incident which they attributed to their religion or belief. This survey also found that Jewish, Muslim and Sikh students were most likely to have experienced hate incidents. This is clearly an area for further study and would benefit from a more developed approach to monitoring religion or belief across the sector.

## 4.2 Types of discrimination and harassment

The data presented above suggest that UK higher education is generally a positive place in which to work and study, and that discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion or belief are issues only for a small minority. However, the evidence points to them being differentially experienced across various religion or belief groups.

During the case studies, researchers asked participants about their experiences of discrimination and harassment. Very few participants had personal stories to tell, but many expressed related stories of incidents where they believed discrimination or harassment had occurred. This is also consistent with wider research on religious discrimination; in 2009, 45% of UK respondents to the *Eurobarometer 317* special research on religious discrimination in the EU stated that discrimination on grounds of religion or belief was 'widespread', whereas only 2% reported personally experiencing it (Eurobarometer, 2009). At the same time, as pointed out by Perfect (2011), a higher percentage (5%) reported witnessing such discrimination. Of course, as with any other data based on recollection and individual testimony, reported incidents are difficult to verify and so need to be understood within this limitation.

### 4.2.1 Discrimination

The Equality and Human Rights Commission defines direct discrimination as 'the less favourable treatment of a person compared with another person because of a protected characteristic', in this case their religion or belief identity. It further defines indirect discrimination as 'the use of an apparently neutral practice, provision or criterion which puts people with a particular protected characteristic at a disadvantage compared with others who do not share that characteristic, and applying the practice, provision or criterion cannot be objectively justified.'

A small minority of staff (4.9%) felt that they had experienced direct discrimination, such as being denied a promotion, an increment, bonus or discretionary one-off payment, or being given a less visible position in a public workplace.

The case study visits identified only one personal experience of possible direct discrimination. An atheist non-academic member of staff told us that she had felt openly discriminated against by

**'I have a horrible feeling that they wouldn't be offered a job in the first place'**

her Christian line manager for expressing atheist views, although the individual did not disclose how this behaviour had been manifested.

In HEIs where there is no policy about the display of promotional materials, there is the opportunity for individual bias to occur. In one collegiate university, students told of their dissatisfaction that college porters often make whimsical decisions about which events to promote. This led to some resentment among some religious groups.

'A number of times recently there have been incidents where colleges have refused to publicise our events. Posters don't get put up or they get vandalised. I have tried to not say what the poster is about until I have gained permission. Some colleges have a policy where the porters have to put a stamp on posters before they can be put up. They are the gatekeepers to information about events and activities.'

A further example was given by an atheist student:

'It is not always clear why things are not going up. There can be blanket bans. This attitude is not exclusive to atheist materials. It really comes down to personal opinion.'

Opinions given in the research were often expressed in response to a concern or feeling that these issues were prevalent rather than by reference to actual examples.

However, one staff focus group participant in a Christian foundation university felt that it was harder for women and easier for men of a particular Christian tradition to be promoted. No other participants backed this up, but some felt that those who were open about their Christian religious observance were more likely to progress within their institution.

In one institution, a participant who described themselves as spiritual with no religion expressed concern that if a Muslim woman who chose to cover her face applied for a non-academic job, she would be discriminated against.

'I have a horrible feeling that they wouldn't be offered a job in the first place.'

Another staff member in the same institution, and who described herself as a Pagan, noted that she had never ‘seen a veiled woman even as a student here.’

### 4.2.2 Harassment

The EHRC defines harassment as any ‘unwanted behaviour that has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity or creates a degrading, humiliating, hostile, intimidating or offensive environment’. The study found few incidents of harassment. It is worth noting that an individual’s sensitivities and perception of harassment may differ and be dependent on nationality, culture, gender or age.

The case studies and questionnaire results provided a range of one-off examples of harassment; however, the most regularly cited examples relate to the use of language. Incidents ranged from outright and obvious use of offensive language to the more pervasive and general use of unacceptable small talk or office banter.

The issue of office banter that caused offence was a frequent concern. During one case study visit, a Christian academic spoke about mild office banter that tended to be targeted at some groups more than others:

‘Within some parts of academia there was an unspoken feeling that religion is something that visible minorities do and that this was respected. This is not something that white people did. If you meet any British white person who says ‘actually, I go to church’ the reaction is sometimes surprised – not great. It’s not discrimination, just silly banter, but you need to be a bit careful.’

An equality and diversity adviser in another institution explained that administrative staff are not encouraged to reveal their religion or belief as ‘there are jokes and jibes which are occasionally aimed at religion and belief’. An equality and diversity manager in another institution explained that the use of offensive office banter was unacceptable at the university:

‘Making fun of someone’s religion or culture is just as offensive as making fun of somebody’s age. Banter in the office is tackled in the training as something we call environmental harassment. It doesn’t have to be there. Sometimes [the staff] go away thinking this is a little bit mad, but they do understand that our policies do not allow people to do that, and that there is a personal liability.’

A Christian academic in one university felt that to openly declare his Christianity left him open to ridicule by colleagues. He provided an example of when he had challenged another member of staff who had made discriminatory comments against a student during a conversation with other academics. He described a time when a student on a religious studies course passed a module on introduction to Islam, but had failed a similar module on introduction to Christianity. This was discussed and a senior colleague around the table said that in his view anyone who failed introduction to Christianity deserved a first class grade. The Christian member of staff went on to say:

‘He clearly felt strongly. He was an atheist and he said it as a kind of joke but I said to him afterwards – would you have said that if the student had failed introduction to Islam. He admitted that he wouldn’t have dared to. It would have been beyond the pale. I told him that you couldn’t make judgments between religions. I don’t think it was rampant discrimination, just lazy thinking.’

This example illustrates the dilemmas faced by staff. They are often nervous about disclosing their religion or belief identity for fear of discrimination or harassment. It then becomes very difficult to challenge issues where individuals make discriminatory comments relating to religion or belief because of their perception that this will lead to further recriminations.

A Jewish student described how, when they complained via email, the staff member involved responded by taking issue with the student’s right to comment on his behaviour in his own classroom, and threatened the student not to take the matter further. The student withdrew the allegation for fear that he would jeopardise his academic career. The student sought support from his Jewish colleagues and a rabbi.

The lack of monitoring data for religion or belief makes it difficult to judge the prevalence and distribution of incidents

‘Making fun of someone’s religion or culture is just as offensive as making fun of somebody’s age’

of harassment on the grounds of religion or belief in relation to harassment on other grounds. Comparative data for religion or belief groups in the UK are not widely available; however, the Community Security Trust publishes annual data on antisemitic hate crime (CST, 2011).

What measures has your institution taken to prevent the creation of a 'hostile atmosphere', in line with the requirements of the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006? Are these measures merely reactive, or are they in line with their positive equality duty to foster good relations?

### 4.3 Institutional responses

Institutions respond to issues of discrimination and harassment using a number of approaches.

#### 4.3.1 Policy responses

All the participating HEIs have policies that provide a framework to guide their response to religion or belief issues.

**Table 4.4 Policy responses to religion or belief issues by HEIs**

Policy	Relationship to religion or belief
Dignity at work or anti-bullying	These policies relate to individuals' right to work free from harassment, including on the grounds of religion or belief. They underline the responsibility of all employees to maintain an environment where respect for individuals is paramount.
Photo-identity	These policies relate to institutions' use of photo-identity cards to verify individuals' identities to maintain security. For Muslim women who choose to cover their face, some institutions have implemented alternative procedures. These policies highlight the procedures that need to be followed by staff and students when proof of identity is required.
Availability and use of quiet rooms	Space for quiet contemplation, meditation or prayer is considered for a range of individuals, including those from religion or belief groups. These policies outline staff and students' rights and responsibilities regarding the use of such spaces.



**‘We don’t have a policy on religion and belief. Our policies are a bit vague.’**

In the collegiate HEI, each college, as an autonomous organisation, has its own policy which is influenced by overarching institutional guidance. In this instance, it is challenging to achieve consistency across the institution.

Although most HEIs have equality and diversity policies, the way in which these are interpreted in relation to religion or belief varies. One area of concern expressed across several HEIs is the lack of guidance to staff on dealing with issues of personal identity and security, such as during examination invigilation. One institution has a separate policy for this, which is covered during staff training.

‘The university provides training for all exam invigilators, and the need to identify Muslim women students wearing face coverings is explicit. A female invigilator identifies the student in a private room.’

A number of staff expressed a belief that policies in this area are helpful in raising awareness of issues, and that they help staff to respond to issues of religion or belief in a more proactive manner.

‘We don’t have a policy on religion and belief. Our policies are a bit vague. We have an equality and diversity policy that says we won’t discriminate on the grounds of religion, but we need to be more specific. It would help us to be proactive. It would help us to be responsive to issues of religion and belief.’

In many institutions, the policy framework for staff and students is different. This means that there is often a lack of consistency in how different groups are dealt with within the institution. In one university, an equality and diversity manager expressed some frustration:

‘There is a dignity at work policy for staff, but there is no dignity at study policy.’

The students’ union in this institution has an equality and diversity policy, but this does not extend to issues of bullying in the place of work or study. There may be value in HEIs and students’ unions considering whether further policy may need to be developed in this area.

Given the challenges that HEIs face in creating institution-wide policies in this area, it is interesting to note that some HEIs encourage forums to facilitate discussion around the generation and development of new policy in this area. Where there is a lack of coherence across policies, staff and students may receive inconsistent messages. One equality and diversity adviser explained:

‘We are being asked more questions than we are able to answer. It leads us to realise that we need to explore these issues further and to produce some kind of policy or code.’

The extent to which individuals use HEIs’ policy and procedural documents is unclear, and there is a feeling that staff are reluctant to highlight incidents of harassment or bullying for fear of further repercussions. Evidence for this is anecdotal. One equality and diversity manager explained this concern:

‘I don’t think the policies are widely known about or adequate. You can either complain to your manager (which is difficult if your manager is the problem), or you can go through a grievance procedure, and I think there is a stigma attached to that. It isn’t a pleasant process. People might think they will be classed as trouble-makers. I think people are aware of the grievance procedure, but I think they are less aware that we have a bullying policy, and I think they would be uncomfortable in bringing issues up, so this is an area we have got to work on.’

This may be due to a wider issue of how members of institutions are made aware of and apply policies in general, and not an issue related specifically to religion or belief. However, in the light of this, it is valuable to examine any evidence from the study, specifically in relation to the process of incident reporting in relation to religion or belief.

Do your institution's equality and diversity policies include policies around religion or belief? How have these changed or developed in the light of recent changes in legislation?

What stakeholders should be consulted when developing institutional policies around religion or belief?

What are your institution's obligations when harassment occurs in different contexts and locations (for example, classroom or cafeteria, university property or students' union property, students' union event or private gathering)? Are current regulations sufficient to deal with these complexities?

### 4.3.2 Incident reporting

Both the case studies and the survey data indicate that reported incidents of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion or belief are relatively rare when taken across the staff and student population as a whole. Data from the questionnaire revealed that less than 1% of staff respondents and 1.7% of student respondents had made a complaint since 2003.

Two opposing views of why this might be were offered. It was argued that the ethos and values of tolerance are prevalent in HEIs; discrimination and harassment on grounds of religion and belief are not widespread in HEIs and therefore it is unsurprising that few incidents are reported. Some staff within institutions with a religious foundation argued that these institutions were particularly respectful of issues relating to religion or belief. In one such institution, a lecturer said that 'hopefully we are promoting a basis for people to respect each other.' The Christian value of tolerance was referred to several times as defining the nature of this particular institution.

An alternative view is that individuals would be reluctant to report incidents of discrimination and harassment for fear of repercussions. However, there was little evidence to suggest that this is especially true for cases related to religion or belief. There was some concern that international students are more reluctant to complain about any issue of equality and diversity.

**‘For the international students ... to consider rocking the boat in this area would not even enter their mind; the consequences are so high’**

‘For the international students, there is a lot of fear. Many are paying high fees and some are government-sponsored, so to consider rocking the boat in this area would not even enter their mind; the consequences are so high.’

The lack of available monitoring information on religion or belief identities makes it difficult to compare complaints on the grounds of religion or belief with incidents relating to other protected characteristics. The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia found that the absence of relevant data or studies makes the distinction between religion and ethnicity as causes of discrimination practically impossible to measure accurately (EUMC, 2006: 50). The report concluded that the lack of official data collection throughout the EU on the extent and nature of criminal victimisation, including racially/religiously motivated crime in general, makes it impossible to judge the full extent of discrimination and harassment faced by religious groups (EUMC, 2006: 108).

There are challenges for institutions to gain a complete picture of incidents. In order to do this, HEIs will need to gather accurate data on the religion or belief composition of the staff and student bodies, and find ways to share and collate information about the number and type of complaints/incidents. This study indicates that this is currently rarely the case. However, the majority of staff (65%) and of students (88.8%) believe that reported incidents are dealt with as serious disciplinary issues.

Students experiencing discrimination or harassment may turn to the students’ union to raise issues. Other sources of support include tutors, academic counsellors, residential managers, student counsellors and chaplains.

For students who may have experienced discrimination or harassment at the hands of an academic member of staff, the route for complaint is more obvious and tends to be through the academic hierarchy. In most cases, the head of department or school was cited as the most obvious route for complaint.

'There is a clear policy. In the first instance they might go the National Union of Students equal opportunities representative. Some international students might go to the international office. The process would differ if a student brought a complaint against the staff: it would go through the school hierarchy. It would be reported to the head of school.'

Should your institution do more to raise the profile of policies and procedures in relation to addressing discrimination and harassment? If so, what practical steps can be taken?

Does the sector need to explore further the approaches used to collect data on religion or belief and on incidents of discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion or belief?

Should your HEI work with community organisations such as the Community Security Trust to feed into broader community-based reporting mechanisms?

### 4.3.3 Sources of support

Many institutions have mechanisms to support staff with a range of equality and diversity issues, including those relating to religion or belief. These range from providing confidential personal and telephone counselling services to training individuals to be harassment, dignity or equality advisers. The roles of these individuals extend from mentoring support to mediation.

'There is a team of advisers who are intermediaries, trained to listen if you have issues which you are not comfortable taking to your line manager. Sometimes you want to explore issues without making it formal. The role is to provide options: to provide pathways. This supports people to make their decision.'

This support is regularly extended to students through individuals with roles such as student academic representatives, personal tutors, chaplains, lecturers and ‘fresher friends’. Both staff and students are most likely to seek support from chaplains and faith advisers; however, students are more likely to seek support from a broader spread of sources. Tables 4.5 and 4.6 indicate the sources of support staff and students are most likely to access on issues of religion or belief.

**Table 4.5 Who do students go to for help and advice with religion or belief issues**

	Percentage
Chaplaincy/faith advisers	54.6
A range of support	10.7
Students’ union	7.6
Christian union	6.1
Students’ support team	4.8
Academic staff	4.7
Colleagues	3.1
Not sure who to go to	1.3
No-one	1.2
Local place of worship	1.0
Other	0.7
Religious diversity champion	0.5
The internet	0.2
Uncodable	3.4

1201 individuals responded to this question.

**Table 4.6 Who do staff go to for help and advice with religion or belief issues**

	Percentage
Chaplaincy/faith advisers	83.8
Colleagues	4.0
Religious diversity champion	3.3
No-one	2.9
Line manager	1.5
HR department	1.3
Not sure who to go to	0.6
Local place of worship	0.4
Counselling service	0.4
Muslim society	0.2
Students' support team	0.2
Academic staff	0.2
Christian union	0.2
Union representative	0.2
Dignity adviser/harassment adviser	0.1
Website	0.1
Uncodable	0.8

1262 individuals responded to this question.

While chaplains provide valuable pastoral support, further signposting to formal sources of advocacy for issues of discrimination and harassment is necessary in most instances. It is useful to distinguish between general support, for example someone to talk to, and procedural support, such as representation.

A minority of students (34.5% of 3886 respondents) indicated that their students' union supports the religion or belief concerns and issues of students. More than half of the students who responded to this question (57.9%) were unsure whether the students' union in their institution provided support for these issues.

Although HEIs have many policies and procedural documents that deal with issues relating to religion or belief, there is a general consensus that the messages contained in the policies need to be reinforced through induction and ongoing continual professional development opportunities. A number of HEIs have training opportunities relating specifically to issues of religion or belief. These are generally not mandatory, although one HEI was considering making them so. Most HEIs feature equality and diversity as part of their induction programme, although the extent to which religion or belief is covered varies. One equality and diversity manager expressed concern that, while it is possible to enforce training requirements with directly employed staff, this is more difficult with associate staff. It is also difficult to assure quality in the approaches used by this group. However, this is not unique to issues of religion or belief.

How can your institution, students' union and chaplaincy work together most effectively to deal with religion or belief issues?



## 4.4 Summary

The study suggests:

- = the overwhelming majority of participants have not experienced discrimination or harassment on the grounds of religion or belief; however, it is important and distressing for those who have
- = both staff and students indicate that their HEI creates an environment where they generally feel valued
- = there is a variety of sources of support for students with regard to religion or belief, including academic staff, counsellors, students' union advisers, chaplaincy staff and other faith advisers
- = staff have fewer specific sources of support than students, but many HEIs provide dignity or equality advisers in addition to normal line management arrangements
- = students' unions commonly have a formal role in advocacy relating to discrimination and harassment; however, not all students are aware that this is the case
- = policies that deal with issues of discrimination and harassment are generally in place, but HEIs deal with the issue of religion or belief in a variety of ways
- = many HEIs have complex structures, systems and policies, and there can be challenges in coordinating an institutional approach to religion or belief issues
- = institutional practices and policies are commonly produced by a range of institutional stakeholders (senior management, human resources, students' unions and independent multi-faith centres)
- = procedures are generally in place for the reporting of incidents of discrimination and harassment; however, formal reporting of incidents is infrequent
- = most respondents and participants feel confident that complaints, once made, are dealt with as serious disciplinary issues
- = most staff have access to some level of training regarding religion or belief

## 5 Good relations

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The idea of good relations is about exploring ways in which people of differing religions and beliefs can live, work and study together.

The term good relations is used by commentators in a range of different ways. The Inter Faith Network for the UK (2007) identifies good relations as ‘relationships between people of distinctive, historical faith communities’ and suggests finding ways for these groups to come together and coexist in a way that does not ‘lessen the significance of their own tradition’.

The Equality Act 2010 articulates a clear expectation that HEIs as public bodies need to foster good relations between people from different groups, including religion or belief groups. In addition, in Northern Ireland there is also a duty under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to promote good relations. The issue of developing and maintaining good relations should therefore be a high priority for institutions across the UK. This chapter examines how HEIs have approached this issue and explores where tensions have emerged.

It is worth noting that the concept of developing good relations can involve building relationships between HEI religion or belief groups and individuals outside the institution, as well as developing relationships between groups on campus. The scope of this study, however, did not include an exploration of good relations between members of institutions and the outside world, and this chapter focuses on internal good relations alone.

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### 5.1 Interactions between members of religion or belief groups

If good relations is about the ability of different religious groups to coexist and cooperate, then an important test is how far members of different religion or belief groups do actually come together. Interactions between members of different groups can have a positive impact on the development of good relations (Johnson and Tatum, 2009), which raises the question of how far HEIs should actively create opportunities for groups to come together.

This research uncovered a range of examples of HEIs and students’ unions actively attempting to bring together individuals and groups to share and discover mutual interests. In many cases, these are conceived around the idea of cultural exchange, but include building understanding around religion or belief. One interesting example of a cross-faith and cross-cultural activity was provided by an institution that held a ‘death day’,

which examined the issues associated with cultural and religious responses to death and dying.

A number of institutions address good relations as part of their equality and diversity training. Training frequently includes areas such as etiquette, addressing prejudice, and responding to staff and student concerns in culturally sensitive ways. Many of these initiatives around cultural and religious differences are driven by the desire to address the needs of international students. A number of institutions supplement training with information resources for staff, which address both academic and social provision.

HEIs that have a religious foundation can be motivated by the inspiration to develop good relations between people of varied religion or belief. Participants noted that religion is taken seriously in these institutions. Even though the religious foundation institutions in the study were all Christian, an argument was made by both Christians and non-Christians that such institutions create spaces in which religion is respected. One senior member of staff in a Christian foundation HEI explained:

‘We talk about Christian values and we understand religion. We preach tolerance, and our religious beliefs give us credibility when dealing with other religions. The Christian ecumenical ideas that underpin the institution can be useful in creating an atmosphere in which a range of viewpoints are acknowledged.’

This perspective was sometimes challenged by atheist and agnostic members of the institutions concerned, who expressed concern that diverse religious beliefs are acknowledged in a way that non-religious beliefs were not.

Chaplaincies and HEIs provided examples of talks, seminars and lecture series that address the role of religion or belief across a variety of academic disciplines, and that are aimed at building inter-faith dialogue. One HEI provided a range of challenging debates, which include an attempt to answer the questions: ‘Can science prove or disprove the existence of God? Have scientists done away with the need for the universe to have a Creator?’ Other activities include inter-faith cafés and inter-faith weeks. However, it should be noted that use of the terminology of inter-faith can either be intended to be, or be perceived to be,

exclusive of those whose philosophical belief positions are not understood in terms of a faith.

Data gathered during fieldwork revealed chaplaincy services and Christian unions that attempt to provide alternatives to social activities focused around alcohol use. In a number of institutions, Christian union members supply bottled water, tea or coffee to students leaving students' union events late at night. This builds on practice found in the street pastors' movement, where similar services are provided to clubbers late at night in town and city centres across the UK. This demonstrates both a concern for the welfare of fellow students and an activity that is designed, in part, to engage students in the Christian union.

While some institutions have clearly disseminated practices and training designed to foster good relations, others have not. The case studies suggested that where HEIs have dispersed campuses or are based around a collegiate model, it is more difficult to drive consistent good practice around these issues.

Should your institution develop policies and strategies to facilitate good relations between members of different religion or belief groups?

## 5.2 Tensions between different protected characteristics

The equality and diversity agenda draws together a range of issues relating to different groups in society. The Equality Act 2010 identifies nine protected characteristics:

- = age
- = disability
- = gender reassignment
- = marriage and civil partnership
- = pregnancy and maternity
- = race
- = religion or belief
- = sex
- = sexual orientation

An individual may have more than one protected characteristic. For example, someone might be black, gay and a religious believer. They could therefore be discriminated against for their race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. Afridi and Warmington (2010) argue that the issue of multiple identity and multiple discrimination is difficult to manage and is not covered adequately by law. They recommend that relevant agencies and the government need to work together to provide better guidance to individuals and develop a shared vision of priorities for equality legislation. More training in this area is also recommended for public service staff relating to equality (Afridi and Warmington, 2010: 44–45).

Understanding and addressing the needs of individuals' multiple identities offers one area of challenge for HEIs. Another is addressing the tensions that may arise around these interfaces between cultural, religious, sexual and political identity. HEIs provide a space in which individuals are encouraged to explore their identity, discuss ideas and challenge received opinions. This can provide opportunities for conflicts to emerge and for tensions to be aired between individuals with a religion or belief identity and others. Many religion or belief groups include particular stances on a range of issues, including gender, sexual orientation and gender reassignment. This can make it difficult for institution managers to create policies and procedures

that ensure equal rights for all while maintaining the rights of individuals to express their views and convictions. Some evidence-based guidance has been produced for the sector in the form of the LLUK (2010) report *Managing the interface: sexual orientation and faith*.

The case study visits identified some tension between equality strands. Staff at one university described an incident where the multi-faith prayer space was divided so that Muslim men and women could be separated during times of prayer. This caused some discussion among the wider population of women students on the campus, who saw it as a challenge to gender equality.

Tension between sexual orientation and religion was identified at another HEI. In one institution, a complaint had been made regarding the constitution of the Christian union by an individual representing lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) interests. The equality and diversity manager for the institution explained that:

‘This was difficult because the Christian union is not part of the students’ union or the university, so while it is unacceptable for most that the constitution states explicitly that committee members shouldn’t be active homosexuals, all we can do is suggest that they review this. That is the point we are at, at the moment.’

‘In my first year, the Christian union was barred from being part of the students’ union because it refused to remove opposition to homosexuality and sex before marriage from its statement of beliefs.’

HEIs are faced with a complex task in ensuring that both LGBT and faith groups/individuals feel respected, while neither group feels unfairly treated or discriminated against.

Can the sector develop any further guidance and models of practice to help HEIs deal with complex issues around the tensions between different protected characteristics?

### 5.3 Freedom of speech

A number of ongoing issues and incidents drawn from international politics, including the relations between Islam and western ideologies, have produced tensions within higher education. In particular, debates around the prevention of religious extremism on campus versus freedom of speech and expression have received extensive media coverage, which has led to this issue becoming a high priority for UK HEIs. A Universities UK (2010) report reviews the ways in which HEIs have managed a commitment to academic freedom alongside responsibilities to ensure national security and to respond to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Institutions may address these issues through active engagement with what is often identified as ‘radical Islam’, or through reducing the space to which groups inspired by such interpretations of Islam have access (effectively limiting freedom of speech on campus by banning meetings, leaflets, etc). An institution’s approach will be informed by its attitude to freedom of speech, equalities and other human rights; its interest in becoming involved with the political and religious positions of staff and students; and its willingness to comply with security-driven initiatives in this area.

*Promoting good campus relations: dealing with hate crimes and intolerance* (Universities UK et al, 2005) argues that, in order to deal with hate crimes and intolerance on campus, everyone must understand that all staff and students have the right to work, study and live without fear of intimidation, harassment and threatening or violent behaviour. The guidance argues that the key ingredient for the preservation of academic freedom is tolerance and respect for diversity. However some commentators, such as Academics for Academic Freedom (AFAF), argue that academic freedom cannot be constrained by notions such as tolerance and respect for diversity. AFAF argues that preserving academic freedom means HEIs have to be willing to listen to viewpoints that are challenging and offensive.

Others – such as Klaff (2010) – argue that the distinction between challenging and offensive viewpoints and hate speech can be difficult to draw in practice. Klaff argues that the political debate around the academic boycott of Israel has often utilised antisemitic tropes and has thus moved into the area of hate

speech. This perspective is shared by some respondents to the survey, who noted that discussion of Palestine could lead to 'discriminatory remarks' or 'spill-over from legitimate criticism to outright antisemitism', and make inter-faith activity 'almost impossible'. Institutions are faced with some challenging decisions in navigating their way through the various political, legal and ideological issues raised by this kind of discussion.

Institutions are attempting to steer a careful path through these issues and protect themselves with detailed reference to the law and to sector guidance. However, as the example of the academic boycott of Israel shows, there are often competing values, agendas and guidance which make incidents highly particular and blanket generalisations difficult. It is likely that the relationship between the values of academic freedom and the legal responsibilities of institutions will continue to be debated and contested. It may be helpful if such matters, insofar as they relate to religion or belief, are engaged with as part of a more general discussion rather than being dealt with in a more isolated way.

Higher education is an environment where levels of social, ethnic and religious diversity are combined with an imperative for the free and frank exchange of ideas and views. This has the potential to create some challenges. The Equality Act 2010, for example, reaffirms students' rights to not be discriminated against in admission, education or facilities within the HEI. The Act does not allow the use of academic freedom as an excuse for expressing discriminatory views; but within the curriculum, HEIs are allowed to include a full range of issues and ideas from multiple perspectives, which allows discussion of controversial views.

The results of this study indicate that the majority of staff and students feel that freedom of speech is valued at their institution. Respondents were asked to indicate the level to which their institution values freedom of speech. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 show the responses to this question for staff and students.



**Table 5.1 The extent to which staff agree with the statement 'Freedom of speech is valued in my place of work'**

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	610	20.0
Agree	1527	50.0
Disagree	513	16.8
Strongly disagree	125	4.1
Don't know	280	9.2
Total	3055	100.0

**Table 5.2 The extent to which students agree with the statement 'Freedom of speech is valued at my place of study'**

	Number	Percentage
Strongly agree	1525	39.5
Agree	2090	54.2
Disagree	209	5.4
Strongly disagree	35	0.9
Total	3859	100.0

Further analysis of the individuals who disagreed or strongly disagreed that their institution valued freedom of speech revealed a difference between staff and students. Far larger percentages of the total staff cohorts for each religion or belief group disagreed or strongly disagreed across all religion or belief groups. The largest group who disagreed or strongly disagreed were staff members who described themselves as spiritual (26.8%). The religion or belief group with the largest percentage of students who disagreed or strongly disagreed that their institution values freedom of speech were Sikhs (8.3%).

The results of the research provide no clear explanation for this phenomenon; however, it is possible that staff feel constrained by the circumstances of their employment from voicing opinions based on their religion or belief. The expectation that higher education is an environment where opinions are freely exchanged as part of students' learning experience is possibly the explanation for why fewer students from religious groups have concerns about the way their institution values freedom of speech.

**Table 5.3 Number of staff who disagree or strongly disagree that their place of work values freedom of speech**

	Number	Percentage*
Spiritual	37	26.8
Muslim	23	25.6
Pagan	11	25.0
No religion	255	22.7
Hindu	10	18.9
Other	12	18.8
Christian	267	18.5
Sikh	5	17.3
Jewish	6	15.4
Buddhist	6	14.6
Uncodable	6	46.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>638</b>	

\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question

**Table 5.4 Number of students who disagree or strongly disagree that freedom of speech is valued in their place of study**

	Number	Percentage*
Other	12	17.1
Sikh	3	8.3
No religion	92	7.4
Jewish	3	4.0
Muslim	24	6.7
Spiritual	12	6.4
Buddhist	4	5.1
Christian	88	5.1
Pagan	4	5.0
Hindu	2	2.6
Uncodable	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>244</b>	

\* of members of religion or belief group who responded to this question

**‘One thing we do at the union is to promote how to report hate crime. We ensure students know how to come to us.’**

The case studies provided few examples where an individual’s right to freedom of speech had been challenged. One example involved an incident where a preacher from the United States visited a city in which an HEI is based and made a number of public sermons in which he referred to biblical teachings on the subject of the immorality of homosexuality. This resulted in a number of debates on campus that elicited a polarity of views. As a result, one student posted his negative views about gay people, based on his own Christian perspectives, on the social networking site *Facebook*. He was subsequently called to account for his behaviour by his tutor, who accused him of displaying discriminatory views. The student believed it was his right to communicate his religious views openly. This issue brought into relief the perceived tensions between policies upholding religious freedom and those upholding a more general freedom of speech.

All participating HEIs have policies regarding equality and diversity, some of which cover issues relating to freedom of speech. However, students’ unions also have a role to play with regard to freedom of speech. One students’ union democracy and activities manager explained:

‘One thing we actually do at the union is to promote how to report hate crime. We ensure students know how to come to us. We promote this quite strongly, and we do training for the clubs and societies, explaining what we will and won’t tolerate.’

Staff and students may look to use language in a way that does not cause any perceived offence. However, it is worth noting that banning the use of particular language, including language with a religious significance, can cause difficulties. In one university, a Christian academic explained that, in an attempt to be inclusive, the institution had banned the use of the word ‘Christmas’:

‘There was a misguided attempt to ban the word ‘Christmas’ from the annual works carol service. It was very much junior managerial silliness. Somebody attempting to be inclusive just got silly.’

What effects do certain sorts of discourse (and, in some cases, harassment and discrimination) have on the ability of others in a university community to practise their right to freedom of speech? Does this have an impact on their right to express their belief or religion on campus?

What is the difference between freedom of speech and academic freedom? Should different regulations apply within the context of the curriculum than to extracurricular activities at university?

When tensions between equality strands occur, what tools exist (or should exist) within HEIs to resolve them?

### **5.3.1 Freedom of expression of religion and belief**

Individuals' rights to freedom of freedom of thought, conscience and religion are enshrined in the *Universal declaration of human rights* (UN, 1948). As expressed in the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, these are absolute rights. Thus, as stated in article 9 of the convention:

'Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief.'

These absolute rights can also be given expression through:

'freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.'

At the same time, these rights of expression can be subject to certain (although restricted) limitations:

'Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs shall be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.'

The principles of the European Convention are reflected in the UK's Human Rights Act 1988. The difficulties arising for HEIs and for groups within them occur in relation to the interpretation and

application of these limited grounds upon which the rights to manifest thought, conscience and religion can be restricted.

The majority of staff (79.4% of 3064) indicated that they felt comfortable expressing their religion or belief identify in the workplace. Student respondents were asked to indicate to which groups they felt comfortable expressing their religion or belief identity; Table 5.5 shows their responses to this question.

**Table 5.5 Groups to which students feel comfortable expressing their religion or belief**

	Number	Percentage
Friends	3461	16.4
Students in your tutor group/ lectures	2774	13.1
Personal academic tutor/ director of studies	2646	12.5
Other lecturers	2187	10.4
University services (housing, medical centre, counselling, student support)	2201	10.4
Students in your university accommodation or housemates	2181	10.3
Students' union societies (excluding sports teams)	2013	9.5
Staff in your university accommodation	1701	8.1
University sports teams	1635	7.7
None of the above	327	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>21,126</b>	<b>*</b>

3862 people responded to the question, which allowed multiple responses. In total there were 21,126 responses to the question.

\*The percentages shown have been subject to rounding and therefore do not total 100%.

In general, students are more willing to express their religion or belief in more informal situations, and where the people to whom they were expressing their religion or belief are better known to them.

An indicator for freedom of expression is the extent to which individuals feel able to promote their religion or belief or to bring others over to their point of view. 48.7% of staff (2997 respondents) and 57.6% of students (3816 respondents) felt that they were unable to do this. Tables 5.6 and 5.7 indicate the barriers staff and students experience that prevent them from promoting their religion or beliefs or bringing others over to their point of view.

**Table 5.6 Barriers to the promotion of religion or belief as experienced by staff**

	Number	Percentage
It isn't the sort of thing that I would do	1134	69.7
I fear that I would experience a negative reaction if I did	328	20.1
It is against the rules of the college/university	133	8.2
Don't know	33	2.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>1628</b>	<b>100.0</b>

1510 people responded to the question, which allowed multiple responses. In total there were 1628 responses to the question.

**Table 5.7 Barriers to the promotion of religion or belief as experienced by students**

	Number	Percentage
It isn't the sort of thing that I would do	1770	69.6
I fear that I would experience a negative reaction if I did this	535	21.0
It is against the rules of the college/university	60	2.4
Don't know	179	7.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2544</b>	<b>100.0</b>

2277 people responded to the question, which allowed multiple responses. In total there were 2544 responses to the question.

In general, both staff and students feel that attempting to bring others over to their point of view is not the sort of thing that they would do. A small number of students and a slightly larger number of staff feel that they are prevented from promoting their religion and belief by the rules of their HEI. The study did not reveal any institutions where this is generally the case, and it may be worth investigating how far this perception is reflected in institutions' policies and procedures.

Around a fifth of staff and students who said that they would not feel able to bring others over to their point of view attributed this to concern about a possible negative reaction.

Around half of students (54.4%) and almost three-quarters of staff (73.4%) reported that they had never been approached by someone promoting their religion or belief in order to bring them over to their point of view. The feelings of those who had been approached are shown in tables 5.8 and 5.9.

**Table 5.8 Have you been approached by anyone with the intention of bringing you over to their point of view (staff)**

	Number	Percentage
Yes and I was fine with this	376	12.3
Yes and I was uncomfortable with this	324	10.6
Yes and I felt harassed	111	3.6
No	2241	73.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>3052</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 5.9 Have you been approached by anyone with the intention of bringing you over to their point of view (students)**

	Number	Percentage
Yes and I was fine with this	983	25.3
Yes and I was uncomfortable with this	481	12.4
Yes and I felt harassed	308	7.9
No	2111	54.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>3883</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As with many other issues in this study, the question of appropriate behaviour when attempting to influence the religion or belief of others is complex. Of the respondents who have been approached, around half reported that they were fine with it, while the other half reported discomfort or harassment. HEIs may feel that they do not have a responsibility (or right) to intervene to prevent discomfort, but they may have a duty to respond to harassment. However, the harassment reported in this survey data may not correspond with the legal definition of harassment. There may be value in exploring this issue further in order to produce more detailed guidance.

Should HEIs or the sector as a whole develop clearer guidelines about attempts to bring others over to your point of view? The purpose of such guidelines could be to clarify commitments to freedom of speech and to sharpen definitions of what actually meets the legal definition of harassment.

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### 5.4 Summary

This study suggests:

- = while many HEIs seek to promote good relations through shared space and activities, this can be difficult for collegiate institutions or those with multiple campuses where activities to promote good relations tend to be ad hoc and lack connection to an overarching policy
- = chaplains play an important role in promoting good relations by coordinating inter-faith activities and some projects and activities that span cultural and religion or belief stances, such as Fair Trade strategies
- = there are some tensions between religion or belief groups and other equality strands within higher education, particularly between religion or belief and sexual orientation
- = the overwhelming number of participants in the study believe that freedom of speech is valued within their own university; however, the majority of participants would not feel comfortable promoting their religion or belief on campus



## 6 Conclusions

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This UK-wide research into the experiences of staff and students in higher education with regard to religion or belief is intended to inform further development of inclusive policies and approaches to meet new legislative requirements and good practice. It explores issues relating to participation and access, religious observance, discrimination and harassment, and good relations through a number of methodological approaches.

The sector is currently dealing with issues relating to religion and belief in a careful and thoughtful manner with clear awareness of the law. The majority of staff and students are satisfied with the way in which their institution handles religion and belief issues. However, there are tensions and issues that HEIs and the sector as a whole may wish to examine further. It is important to recognise that institutions are likely to find themselves in the position of balancing the competing demands of different stakeholders rather than resolving issues in the way that all parties would ideally like.

The issue of access and participation notes the way in which religion and belief has the potential to shape the engagement of staff and students in higher education. An institution's ability to make judgments about the adequacy of its provision requires appropriate data collection; there is currently little information on religion or belief collected by individual HEIs. The place of alcohol within higher education, and the different dietary needs associated with religions or beliefs, are issues worth considering.

The desire by those with a religion or belief to observe their religion or belief in a variety of different ways is frequently in tension with the logistical demands of scheduling and organising institutional activity. The provision of space for prayer, worship, meditation, contemplation and celebration is an issue that needs to be carefully managed to ensure equal access by all religion or belief groups. There are potential issues about how institutions reflect their religious foundations or religious basis in institutional processes and events, how non-Christian religion or belief celebrations are recognised by HEIs, and how religious dress and symbols are accommodated.

The overwhelming majority of respondents reported that they feel valued by their institution and that they have not experienced harassment or discrimination. However, some patterns emerged in relation to the experience of particular religion or belief groups. The research found that, although procedures are generally in place for reporting incidents of discrimination and harassment, formal reporting of incidents is infrequent. There is a variety of sources of support for students who have issues relating to their religion or belief, but fewer avenues available for staff.

The potential tensions between different religion or belief groups, and between religion or belief groups and other groups protected by equality legislation, are of some concern to HEIs. An evaluation of where the role of the HEI begins and ends in managing good relations is of critical importance for the sector in moving this issue forward. The need to defend academic freedom while addressing good relations and meeting legal obligations raises challenges for HEIs, and it is hoped the findings of this report will inform responses to these.

Many of the findings here will stimulate thinking within the context of a single institution. However, there are also a number of key issues that would benefit from further consideration at the sector level.

- = The need for national (and local) monitoring data – the lack of such data on the religion or belief make-up of the staff and student body in HEIs makes it difficult to link the findings of this research to more general data. The overwhelming majority of participants in the study indicated that they would be willing to provide information about their religion or belief as long as a clear rationale is given for collecting the data.
- = The position of alcohol in the student experience – alcohol clearly has an important part in the culture of (undergraduate) students, and this is unlikely to change as the result of any policy initiatives on behalf of the sector. However, this study suggests that for some students, particularly those with a religion or belief, the position of alcohol in many student activities acts as a barrier to participation. Many HEIs, students' unions and chaplaincies are aware of this and provide alternatives. The sector may wish to explore how these alternatives are working, and continue to discuss the appropriate place of alcohol in the student experience.
- = Freedom of speech – although the majority of staff and students expressed a belief that freedom of speech is valued, some staff have concerns about how to balance the rights to freedom of expression with sensitivity to individuals' religion or belief.
- = The curriculum – this provides a space for individuals and groups to encounter and explore a range of issues relating to religion and belief. Issues may emerge across all disciplines, from theology to engineering, and there may be value in further thinking about how to support teaching staff in dealing with the intersection between religion or belief and the curriculum.

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## Appendix: Methodology

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### Stakeholder engagement

Following an initial inception meeting, the project design, steering and report group convened to consider and develop the research methods and instruments. The inception phase culminated in two stakeholder consultation activities, the purpose of which was to engage stakeholders in order to refine the research aims, collect initial data, and gain their commitment in disseminating information about the research to members of their networks.

Stakeholders were invited from the broad range of national religion and belief groups, unions, and equality and diversity practitioners. Structured discussions conducted by the project manager obtained the views of stakeholders. A full report on these events can be found at [www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE/project-news/stakeholder-meeting](http://www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE/project-news/stakeholder-meeting).

Stakeholders contributed to the design of the research tools and commented on the final report.

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### Literature review

The literature review informed the project around the role of religion or belief in HEIs, exploring three major themes:

- = religion or belief as an equality strand in the UK context
- = equality and diversity in higher education
- = religion or belief in higher education

Keywords were identified by initial searches and terms gathered from the stakeholder meetings. This was followed by a desk-based review to identify material relating to equality in higher education with particular reference to religion or belief and religious discrimination.

The draft review was then sent to the project design, steering and report group, where gaps in research were identified and added. The literature review can be found at [www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE](http://www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE).

## National survey

Two linked national surveys were launched to explore the experience of higher education in relation to religion or belief for staff and for students.

The questionnaires were administered online to provide maximum security and anonymity while keeping costs to a minimum. A variety of national networks were used to recruit respondents including the full range of stakeholders. All stakeholders were encouraged to disseminate information about the surveys to their own contacts. In addition, the survey was publicised through a variety of channels including stakeholder websites, institutional emails and *Twitter*. Response rates were carefully monitored at regular intervals to ensure adequate coverage and, where this was not the case, follow-up telephone calls were made to seek support for the surveys. The surveys were open from the end of October 2010 until 3 January 2011, and resulted in responses by 3077 staff from 131 institutions and by 3935 students from 101 institutions. The survey collected responses from individuals working or studying in HEIs located in all four UK countries. Respondents by religion and belief group are as shown in tables A1 and A2:

**Table A1 Survey responses by religion or belief group (students)**

	Number	Percentage
Christian	1724	43.8
No religion	1249	31.4
Muslim	356	9.1
Spiritual	187	4.8
Pagan	79	2.0
Buddhist	78	2.0
Hindu	77	2.0
Jewish	75	1.9
Other	70	1.8
Sikh	36	0.9
Uncodable	4	0.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3935</b>	<b>*</b>

\* may not total exactly 100% due to rounding

**Table A2 Survey responses by religion and belief group (staff)**

	Number	Percentage
Christian	1442	46.8
No religion	1124	36.5
Spiritual	138	4.5
Muslim	90	2.9
Other	64	2.1
Hindu	53	1.7
Pagan	44	1.4
Buddhist	41	1.3
Jewish	39	1.3
Sikh	29	0.9
Uncodable	13	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>3077</b>	<b>*</b>

\* may not total exactly 100% due to rounding

Survey respondents were originally offered a more finely differentiated range of options through which to identify their religion or belief; in particular, further Christian and non-religious options. However, for the purposes of analysis and reporting alongside other broad religion or belief categories (such as Hindu and Muslim), the originally differentiated Christian and non-religious results were aggregated.

During the regrouping of data on the religion or belief identities of respondents, a number of responses were deemed uncodable. For more information on the collation and analysis of data, please refer to appendix 2, which can be found at [www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE/downloads](http://www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE/downloads).

Staff respondents represented academic staff (1341 responses across the full range) and support or technical staff (1645) including cleaners, drivers, administrative staff, library assistants and student welfare workers. 77.5% of staff respondents were full-time employees, with the rest working a flexible, part-time pattern. A slightly higher proportion of female staff (57.0%) than male staff responded to the survey.

78.0% of the student respondents were UK residents. 67.0% of the student responses were from undergraduate students and

19.7% studied taught postgraduate courses. Slightly more female students (58.4%) than male students responded. This reflects to some extent the higher proportion of female students in the sector (HESA, 2011).

Questionnaires completed online were imported using SNAP software and subsequently analysed using SPSS. The project design, steering and report group used the initial analysis of the responses to inform discussion about further interrogation of the data against specific issues.

It is important to note that this survey was not intended to be statistically representative, and could not be constructed to be so, given the current lack of data collection that would allow the necessary sampling to take place. At the same time, the pattern of responses to the survey from students and staff appears to broadly reflect the distribution of religion or belief groups in the UK relative to the population, as understood from the 2001 census, with the following exceptions:

- = a smaller proportion of staff and student respondents identifying as Christian
- = a larger proportion of respondents identifying as being of no religion
- = a larger proportion of respondents who in the census would be recorded as 'other', but who in our survey were able to identify as 'other' or as Pagan
- = those identifying with the option of 'spiritual' could also be aligned with the census category of 'other', 'no religion' or 'not stated'

Such differences could be explained by the high concentration of younger adults in the HEI student body, bearing in mind that, among the general population, 'no religion' responses are proportionately greater among younger adults than in other age groups. However, because of the impossibility of constructing a precise sample, readers should not attempt in any simplistic way to extrapolate figures and percentages given in this report across the sector as a whole.

Full details of the survey responses can be found in appendix 3 ([www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religion-and-belief-staff-and-students-in-he](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religion-and-belief-staff-and-students-in-he)).

## Institutional case studies

For the purposes of this research, the study distinguished between four broad categories of higher education institution:

- = collegiate ancient universities
- = redbrick universities
- = new universities
- = university colleges (colleges of higher education), including church colleges

The sample included two HEIs in each of the redbrick, modern, and university college (college of higher education) categories and one collegiate ancient university. Institutions were selected to ensure a geographical spread, including one in each of the four countries of the UK. Due to the sensitive nature of the research, anonymity has been maintained for all participating case study HEIs.

The project team identified a lead contact within each institution who provided ongoing support to the project. The contacts in each HEI were crucial in planning appropriate timings for the visits.

Each fieldwork visit was conducted over a minimum of two days in each of the seven institutions, and included focus groups and interviews with both staff and students as well as a range of meetings to discuss management processes and issues with key staff. All research activities were undertaken using prepared discussion guides to ensure consistency. All research-focused conversations were digitally recorded for quality assurance purposes and to ensure accurate recall of discussion content.

Case studies sought to develop a comprehensive picture of the issues within each particular HEI. They included observation and the collection of documentation as well as interviews or focus groups, typically with the following groups/individuals:

- = student religious societies and associations
- = university equality and diversity officers
- = groups of staff or students with a particular religion or belief
- = students' union officers with responsibility for religion or equality and diversity

- = clergy and ministers linked with the HEI
- = institutional senior managers

The results of the visits were analysed thematically and incorporated into full reports for the use of the project design, steering and report group in preparing the final project report.

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## Reporting

Throughout the research, the expertise of the project design, steering and report group has been utilised to inform all aspects of the project. The group assumed particular involvement in the writing of many aspects and phases of the reporting process. The group was responsible for checking all aspects of the report for content authenticity and accuracy, and for suggesting literature and approaches to supplement the report writing phase.

Each of the phases of the research resulted in a written outcome, a number of which are available via the project website at [www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE](http://www.derby.ac.uk/ehs/research/religion-and-belief-in-HE).

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## Equality Challenge

Unit works to further and support equality and diversity for staff and students in higher education across all four nations of the UK.

ECU works closely with colleges of higher education and universities to seek to ensure that staff and students are not unfairly excluded, marginalised or disadvantaged because of age, disability, gender identity, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity status, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, or through any combination of these characteristics or other unfair treatment.

Providing a central source of expertise, research, advice and leadership, we support institutions in building a culture that provides equality of both opportunity and outcome, promotes good relations, values the benefits of diversity and provides a model of equality for the wider UK society.



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