

Religion and Belief in the Workplace

Introduction

Religion and belief play an integral part in the lives of many people around the world. Acknowledging and accepting the importance of religion and philosophical beliefs (or the absence of beliefs) is therefore a key element of an inclusive workplace.

Colleagues should feel confident that they can bring that part of them to work, that they can undertake the practices that are important to them and share as much as they wish about their faith without fear of discrimination. Religion can sometimes be viewed as a problematic topic to raise in the workplace, with the potential to lead to conflict, given the strength of opinion and emotion it can generate. This means that it is often overlooked as part of our inclusion work and ignored in the workplace, which can make colleagues who are practicing more reluctant and less comfortable to share this aspect of their lives.

In our diverse and at times fractured society, acknowledging and celebrating the diversity of faiths and beliefs (including colleagues without a belief) is a key way to bring people together and unfortunately, if ignored can also be a source of misunderstandings, subtle or more overt exclusion or even conflict in the workplace.

This package aims to provide **best practice guidance on how to approach religion and belief in the workplace. Additionally, to provide content which goes beyond workplace issues to help raise awareness about the major religions in the UK** – to help further our understanding of each other.

Note on terminology in this package

Religions are historic and cultural systems that transform with time, while faith is an individual's value and belief structure. Faith and belief are more interchangeable, whilst religion is a means through which people can express their faith.

The term faith is used in this package to cover the concepts of religion and belief.

Using this package

We recommend that you give careful thought to your organisation's approach to promoting tackling faith inclusion. We have provided a range of resources in this package which should help you with your thinking and planning. Below we outline the individual resources available and our suggestions for how you might use them.

Resource	Suggestion
<p>1. Faith discrimination in the workplace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and background on the rise of faith discrimination in the workplace and beyond. • An overview of the key types of faith discrimination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A briefing document for HR, I&D, policy and decision makers to help them understand key concepts and issues. • Can be facilitated in awareness training for staff and managers.
<p>2. Benefits of a workplace that is inclusive of religion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A summary of societal shifts which mean that focusing on faith inclusion is now critical for workplaces. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Useful background for HR, I&D, policy and decision makers that helps to build a case for having a dedicated response to faith inclusion. • Can also be used in training.
<p>3. Profile of the UK population by religion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trends in religious affiliation in the UK population taken from 2001 and 2011 census data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context for faith inclusion work in the UK workplace.
<p>4. Legislation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Features specific to the religion/belief protections. • Common areas where discrimination can occur. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas to consider when shaping a religious inclusion policy and framework. • Awareness raising for managers.
<p>5. Overview of the major religions Including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each religion at-a-glance. • Key dates in the calendar. • Sensitivities and ethics <p>Religions covered:</p> <p>5.1 Buddhism.</p> <p>5.2 Christianity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness raising for all staff as an intranet resource or handouts at training. • For managers, HR and I&D to understand the practices/ barriers for particular staff demographics. • To help I&D or networks develop a calendar of key religious events to

<p>5.3 Hinduism. 5.4 Islam (including a section on 'Islamophobia'). 5.5 Judaism (including a section on Antisemitism). 5.6 Sikhism.</p>	<p>celebrate/recognise in the organisation's diversity calendar.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To consider when reviewing relevant policies such as dress codes/canteen offerings.
<p>6. Building a faith inclusive workplace</p> <p>1. A strategic view. 2. Key areas to explore, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing Accommodations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guidance to help inform an organisational strategy to promote faith inclusion to be used by HR, I&D, policy and decision makers. Areas to consider when shaping a religious inclusion policy. Guidance for managers on how to handle requests for accommodations.
<p>7. Useful resources</p> <p>A range of additional sources of information on promoting faith inclusion, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive Employer Factsheets and Resources. Resources produced by other organisation's. Facilitating multi-faith conversations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To be used to support further work to promote religious inclusion by HR and I&D. Further reading for networks or interested staff and managers. Elements may be used in training or events to promote faith understanding. Aspects could be facilitated as part of a wider communications campaign to raise awareness of faith inclusion across organisations.

We hope you find this package useful. Please do get in touch if you have any questions or comments.

Best wishes,

Inclusive Employers.

Faith discrimination in the workplace

The staff experience

The Faith Research Centre at Savanta ComRes conducted a study on faith in the workplace and published a report in April 2017. It revealed that 3% of respondents had experienced bullying, harassment or discrimination because of their religion, which at the time was equivalent to around one million people. Moreover, a similar number had witnessed this behaviour.

Only a third (35%) of companies with 50-249 employees; were consistently promoting understanding of diversity and inclusion with regards to religion and belief, whilst this figure was 52% for companies with 1,000 employees or more.

The evidence also revealed a significant mismatch between HR and employee perceptions about the provisions their organisation had in place to cater for religious inclusion. For example, whilst 91% of HR managers said their organisation promoted understanding of diversity and inclusion with regards to religion and belief to some or a great extent, only a quarter of workers agreed this was the case.

Rise in intolerance

The 21st century has seen a rise in religious intolerance in many economically developed countries. Various religions have been the target and the perpetrators have come from both religious and non-religious backgrounds. Activities that have been attributed to members of particular religious groups, have led to reprisals on these groups as a whole and on other groups who are perceived to share a common ethnic, national or racial background.

Alongside this, the UK has seen the impact of global socio-politics on local relations between both religious and secular groups, creating attitudinal changes.

The organisations within which we work are not immune to these tensions and in our experience, they are ever present. Additionally, they are of concern to many of our colleagues, who can therefore present themselves in the form of microaggressions, hurtful remarks and fears relating to recruitment to and progression within organisations.

Examples of intolerance towards particular religions that are most frequently expressed within the UK include the following.

- **Islamophobia or Anti-Muslim behaviours**

Fear and dislike of Islam and Muslims has been on the rise in some parts of the world, particularly since the terrorist attacks of September 2001 and July 2005.

Muslims have been victims of hate crimes and intolerance at work or been affected by attacks on Mosques and other instances of anti-Muslim hostility in the wider community. (For more information see the Islam factsheet).

- **Antisemitism**

Motivated by religious or racial hatred (and legally defined as both religious and racial discrimination), antisemitism is hostility towards or prejudice against Jews or Judaism and has been on the rise globally over the last few years in certain countries. The UK has seen the number of antisemitic assaults and related incidents increasing steadily since 2001. Antisemitic incidents have included violent attacks on Synagogues, cases of suspected arson and the desecration of Jewish cemeteries. As with instances of 'Islamophobia', such negativity can affect the lives of Jewish colleagues (For more information see the Judaism factsheet).

- **Sectarianism**

In current usage sectarianism most often refers to internal divisions and hostility between religious groups or denominations of a group often also divided by class, region or political involvement. In the context of the UK, sectarianism usually refers to conflict between the Protestant and Catholic faiths in or related to tensions in Northern Ireland. However, sectarian conflict also exists in parts of Scotland and can still be the cause of problems, as shown clearly in football-related violence in recent history. Additionally, sectarianism is present in many other religions where differences in culture and belief result in hostile relations, for example between some Sunni and Shia Muslim groups.

Sectarian-based intolerance can lead to compromised relationships between groups and individuals in the workplace.

- **Casteism**

Casteism refers to discrimination based on systems of social stratification within communities, often resulting in the maltreatment of an individual or family based on their respective caste level within the culture or community. While caste systems are found in many societies, in the UK caste is understood primarily in relation to cultures from the Indian subcontinent. In religious terms, the caste system is often seen to relate to the Hindu and Sikh faiths, although it is notable that the connection between religion and caste is frequently disputed. Caste discrimination is not currently explicitly covered under UK discrimination law. However, there is provision within the Equality Act 2010 for this to change without the need for further legislation if the government decides to do so.

Benefits of a workplace that is inclusive of religion

Various societal shifts mean that a consideration of religion/belief in the workplace is critical:

- **Immigration**

Immigration to the UK has meant that there has been both a diversification and increase in those choosing to identify with a religion. The 2011 census indicated an increase in those following non-Christian beliefs from 5.8% to 8.4% of the population and this is likely to be reflected in many workplaces. Moreover, a citizenship survey conducted in 2010 indicated that 80% of self-declared Muslims are likely to actively practice their religion, compared to 32% of self-declared Christians.

Organisations therefore need to be confident they can attract and retain a population reflective of the societies in which they operate, in order to derive all the benefits of a diverse workplace including diversity of thought (as outlined in more detail below).

- **Internationalisation of business**

Internationalisation means that companies need to be aware of the religious customs and practices in each country or community where they operate and understand the interplay of these and company values and behaviours. A mismatch can lead to poor employee retention, engagement and dissatisfied customers.

- **Business benefits**

There is wide acceptance of the corporate and social benefits of workforce diversity. As ethnic and religious workplace diversity grows, consideration of religious inclusion will be critical in order to achieve and retain the benefits afforded.

Our anecdotal research suggests that those with a religious conviction will bring strong ethical values and different perspectives to the work they do, which is highly advantageous for many sectors. In addition, employees who connect with the deeper purpose of their work through their beliefs are thought to be more resilient, responsive and passionate about their work.

- **Service delivery**

All sectors and professions will benefit from the richness and diversity of thought that religious inclusion will bring to the workplace. In some professions an insight into and sensitivity towards religious beliefs and practices will be particularly important in relating to a diverse clientele or customer base.

Examples of some of these professions include: those working in Healthcare, Social workers, Counsellors, Psychologists, Lawyers, Judges and Teachers.

- **Generational differences**

Employees today have different expectations of the workplace than their predecessors. In many societies people have the freedom to choose their value systems and beliefs and are more open about these and less willing to disconnect from their personal identities when at work. They expect to be able to express their views freely at work and to be respected regardless.

Those with strong beliefs may be more likely to seek alignment of these with the work they do and the values of their organisation. Businesses that enable employee authenticity are more likely to reap the connected business benefits.

- **Employee well-being**

Workplace well-being programmes are generally accepted as being important for business outcomes. Traditional programmes tend to focus on health and safety, stress and work-life balance, but more recently have extended to cover 'spiritual needs'. This is in recognition that religion can provide an additional source of well-being and comfort, particularly for those working in emotionally charged environments. As a result, more businesses are now providing 'quiet rooms' for the purposes of contemplation or prayer.

Profile of the UK population by religion

The 2001 and 2011 Census data for religion and belief indicate some interesting findings:

- Despite falling numbers since 2001, Christianity remained the largest religion in England and Wales (33.2 million people, 58.3% of the population – previously 71.7%).
- There were increases in those identifying with the other main religious groups, with Islam being recognised as both the second largest and fastest growing amongst the younger population (2.7 million people, 4.8% of the population – previously 3.0%).
- Around a quarter of the population in England and Wales, reported they have no religion in 2011 (14.1 million people, 25.1% of the population – previously 14.8%).
- The religion question was voluntary and 7.2 % chose not to answer.
- London was the most diverse region with the highest proportion of people identifying themselves as Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Jewish.
- The North East and North West had the highest proportion of Christians.
- Wales had the highest proportion of people reporting no religion.

	2001	2011
No religion	14.8	25.1
Christian	71.7	59.3
Muslim	3	4.8
Other	2.8	3.6
Not stated	7.7	7.2

Legislation

Under the Equality Act 2010 those with or without religious beliefs are protected from all the standard forms of prohibited conduct including: direct discrimination (including by association or perception), indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation.

Some important features include:

- Employees are protected against discrimination because they have a religious faith or a philosophical belief, as well as because they don't.
- No one religion or branch of a religion overrides another.
- A philosophical belief must meet certain conditions including being genuinely held, concern a weighty and substantial aspect of human life, worthy of respect in a democratic society and not conflicting with the fundamental rights of others.
- All protected beliefs are equal - whether religious or philosophical.

Common areas where discrimination can occur

Taking time away from work for religious reasons

An employer is under no obligation to automatically give staff time off for religious holidays or festivals, time to pray or a place to pray. However, it is good practice to grant the request where it is reasonably possible to do so. The employer should consider requests carefully and sympathetically, be flexible where possible and discuss any concerns with the employee in order to reach a solution. Refusing a request without a good business reason could amount to discrimination.

Dress code and appearance

If policies concerning appearance/dress code are changing or being reviewed, an employer should consult staff, relevant networks and unions about any proposed changes in order to obtain their input, support and respectfully consider any religious requirements. Where possible, both parties should try to compromise and reach a consensus.

If an employer has rules on dress and appearance, these must be for good business reasons which are proportionate, appropriate and necessary. They should be explained to staff.

Job requirements and religion or belief

In job packs and as part of any selection process an employer should make clear the duties of the role to all job applicants, especially any justifiably core tasks or working arrangements. This includes hours of work and periods of high demand where holidays cannot be taken. This will help to ensure that there are no

misunderstandings about what the job entails and that those who may struggle to meet the essential requirements due to faith or other reasons, can make an informed decision early on.

Some jobs might include duties which would not be consistent with particular religious beliefs. If this is made clear at the start of the recruitment process and an applicant still applies and then requests to opt out, the employer should consider the request and whether it could be reasonably accommodated. The employer does not have to agree if there are sound business reasons for refusing the request. For example, reasons might include serious disruption to the business, putting too much extra work on other staff members, or the task being an essential part of the role (Mba v The Mayor and Burgesses of the London Borough of Merton 2013).

If a member of staff is already in post, and there are changes to their duties which mean they can no longer perform aspects of their role, such as having to perform a medical procedure which they do not condone, or refusing to provide a product or a service to a new client group, then the employer should consider whether the request could reasonably be accommodated, given to another employee who does not share the same belief or whether a refusal would be proportionate. Moreover, previous case law demonstrates that an employee's right to practice a religion or hold a belief is protected. However, it does not necessarily entitle them to practice their beliefs as or where they choose. This is particularly relevant in cases when the exercise of the belief could breach other peoples' rights not to be discriminated against. (McFarlane v Relate Avon Ltd, 2010 and Ladele v The London Borough of Islington and Liberty, 2009).

Service delivery

An employee must not refuse to work with a colleague or client, or refuse to provide a service to a customer, because of their religion or belief, or because of some aspect of the colleague/client/customer's identity covered under the Equality Act. The employer could take disciplinary action against the employee, and the refusal could also lead to a discrimination claim against the employee.

Talking about religion or belief at work

An employer should not try to ban discussion of religion or belief at work. However, an employer may be able to justify some restrictions for reasons such as:

- Protecting the rights of others.
- Protecting the organisation's reputation.
- Preventing colleagues forcing their personal views on others.

Importantly, a colleague's religion or beliefs can be both the target of exclusionary or be the discriminatory behaviour itself, motivating further unacceptable behaviour.

Food and fasting

If an employer offers catering, they should consult with staff, networks and unions on how best to cater for any specific dietary requirements.

Some religions require periods of fasting and/or not eating certain foods at these times. Not all staff from a particular religion will choose to observe this and some will choose to observe only on particular days. It is good practice for employers to become familiar with any periods of observance, so they can consult and agree with staff how best to support them during these times.

Promoting good relations

Those public bodies subject to the Public Sector Equality Duty also have the additional obligation of *promoting good relations between staff and customers from different religious groups* (or those without a religion). This responsibility is further defined as *tackling prejudice* and *promoting understanding*. In other words, they are required to take a proactive approach that is not simply about dealing with discrimination as it occurs. They must take action to help strengthen relationships between religious groups that promote respect, safety, trust and cooperation and take steps to help diffuse any underlying tensions.

Overview of the major religions

In this section we have provided factsheets on the major religions, with some additional content on the contemporary issues of 'Islamophobia' and antisemitism. Information has been drawn from our own research, the BBC website and guides produced by the Higher Education Academy.

PLEASE NOTE: We are aware that religious beliefs and practices vary over time and from place to place, so these factsheets may not accurately reflect the practices of all staff. We would be delighted to receive feedback where the content would benefit from revision.

Buddhism

At-a-glance

- Buddhism is a tradition that focuses on personal spiritual development and the attainment of a deep insight into the true nature and purpose of life.
- In the 2011 Census there were 248,000 Buddhists in the UK.
- Buddhists seek to reach a state of nirvana, following the path of the Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama, who went on a quest for Enlightenment around the sixth century BC. There is no belief in a personal God.
- Buddhism is the story of one man's spiritual journey to enlightenment, and the teachings and ways of living that developed from it which cover the practice and development of morality, meditation and wisdom.
- Buddhists believe that life is endless because individuals are reincarnated over and over.
- Buddhists believe in three signs of existence: impermanence, suffering and uncertainty. The belief that life is impermanent and uncertain because no state, good or bad, lasts forever and that an individual will experience suffering throughout life.
- Buddhists can worship both at home and at a temple.

Key dates in the Buddhist calendar

The specific dates of Buddhist events and celebrations differ across schools of thought and traditions. However, almost all the traditions follow a lunar calendar. The following are only indicative of the kind of religious events Buddhists are likely to celebrate in any year and employers would need to research the dates for a specific calendar year.

Buddhist new year

This is celebrated from the first full moon in April in some countries and from the first full moon in January in many others. There is also local cultural variation.

Parinirvana or Nirvana day

Some Buddhists celebrate Gautama Buddha's death and final enlightenment. It usually falls on the 8th of February or the 15th of February.

Wesak, Vesak or Visakah Puja (Buddha Day)

This is a major Buddhist festival and incorporates the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha. It is celebrated on the first day of the full moon in May (except in leap years, when it falls in June).

Dharma day or Asala

This is a celebration of the Buddha's first teaching after his enlightenment, 'The Wheel of Truth'. It usually falls in July.

Bodhi Day (Enlightenment Day)

This is a celebration of Gautama Buddha's enlightenment and usually falls on the 8th of December.

Ethics

Food and drink - Many Buddhists are vegetarians or vegans. Also, some do not consume alcohol or other intoxicants, therefore sensitivity should be applied in how social gatherings are arranged.

Animal rights - Many Buddhists will not partake in animal experimentation, although this is often an individual choice which may need to be adjusted for.

Christianity

At-a-glance

- Christianity is the most popular religion in the world with over 2 billion adherents.
- Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah promised in the Old Testament and that he is the Son of God.
- Christians believe that God sent his Son to earth to save humanity from the consequences of its sins.
- One of the most important concepts in Christianity is that of Jesus giving his life on the Cross (the Crucifixion) and rising from the dead on the third day (the Resurrection).
- Christians believe that there is only one God but that there are three elements to this one God: The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.
- Christians worship in Churches and their spiritual leaders are called priests or ministers.
- The Christian holy book is the Bible and consists of the Old and New Testaments.
- Christian holy days such as Easter and Christmas are important milestones in the Western secular calendar.

Key dates in the Christian calendar

For centuries Christians oriented their lives around a sacred calendar celebrating the life of Jesus, the saints and the birth of the Church. The Christian calendar encompasses not four seasons but six. Each season has its own colours, its own distinctive scripture readings and its own festivals and commemorations. This secularisation of the calendar is a relatively recent phenomenon. Remembering these seasons may be important for devoutly Christian staff.

Advent

This is the first season of the Christian calendar, beginning in late November or early December. Advent is a Latin word meaning 'coming' and the theme that marks this season is the coming of Jesus, both at his birth and at the end of the world. The colour of this season is either blue or purple to signify royalty. Traditional Churches will often refuse to sing Christmas hymns during this period, waiting until the end of this season (midnight on the 24th December) to celebrate Christmas.

Christmas

In the traditional calendar Christmas is a 'season' lasting 12 days. The colours are white and gold and throughout this period the birth of Jesus as the entry of God into the world is the central theme.

Epiphany

This word means 'manifestation' and is a time of reflection lasting several weeks, during which Christ's manifestation as Messiah is explored. The colours of Christmas usually remain for this season.

Lent

This term comes from an Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'spring' and is a period of penitence, remembering how Jesus called people to follow him. Lent begins with Ash Wednesday, a time when Christians throughout the world receive ashes on their forehead in the form of the cross as a reminder of their mortality. Lent lasts for 40 days, which is symbolic of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. It is a custom among many Christians to practice a discipline of fasting or giving up something during this period. Lent includes what many Christians would identify as the most important week of the year; Holy Week, the seven days prior to Easter. Holy Week begins with 'Palm Sunday', signifying Jesus' entrance to Jerusalem, followed by 'Maundy Thursday', commemorating the Lord's Supper, and 'Good Friday', marking his last hours. The colours of this season are purple or red.

Easter

Like Christmas, Easter is a season rather than a calendar day. Easter commemorates the disciples' experience of Jesus as having defeated death, rising from the dead on the first day of the week. Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following 21st March. The colour of this season is white, and it lasts for 50 days.

Pentecost

The season of Pentecost celebrates the birth of the Church and the miracles and missionary activity of its early days. This season lasts for several months and ends on the day before advent. The colour of this season is green, signifying both the growth of the Church and the spiritual growth of its members.

Ethics

Abortion - Generally Christian Churches are against or discourage abortion—though they are often not as against abortion as their US counterparts. The National Health Service in the UK has made the appropriate accommodations for medical doctors in the UK should their beliefs prohibit their association with an abortion.

Creationism - Opposition to the teaching of evolution in favour of the belief of creationism is relatively rare among British Christians. More common would be the objection by some Christians that the educational system is dominated by only one type of evolutionary theory (Darwinian) to the exclusion of alternate theories on the origins of life.

Sexual orientation - Although some Christians no longer consider sex between same sex couples as incompatible with Scripture, for some this progression is a cause for concern, whilst for others it does not go far enough, calling for a full acceptance of same sex relationships and marriages. This is an issue that currently deeply divides churches.

Sex - There is a strong view among many practicing Christians that sexual activity is to be reserved for marriage.

Hinduism

At-a-glance

- Hinduism is the religion of the majority of people in India and Nepal. It is also practiced by significant populations elsewhere, with over 1.1 billion adherents worldwide.
- In the 2001 Census 810,000 Hindus were recorded as living in the UK.
- Hinduism originated around the Indus Valley near the River Indus in modern day Pakistan. It could be the oldest living religion in the world, documented back many thousands of years.
- Hinduism has no single founder, scripture, and no majority-agreed set of teachings. There have been several key figures teaching different philosophies and writing numerous holy books.
- Most Hindus believe in a Supreme God, whose qualities and forms are represented by a multitude of deities which emanate from him.
- Hindus believe that existence is a cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, governed by Karma.
- Hindus believe that the soul passes through a cycle of successive lives and its next incarnation is always dependent on how the previous life was lived and morally sustained.
- The main Hindu texts are the Vedas and their supplements (books based on the Vedas).

Key dates in the Hindu calendar

The Hindu calendar is lunar and is divided into 12 months based on the phases of the moon and so fall on slightly different dates in the secular calendar each year. Most of these festivals mark aspects of Hindu mythology relating to the gods and goddesses.

Janmashtami

This festival celebrates the birth of the popular Hindu god, Krishna (July / August).

Ganesh Chaturthi

A festival dedicated to the elephant-headed god, Ganesh, the remover of obstacles. (August-September).

Dussehra

A celebration to mark the victory of the popular god Rama and his monkey army over the demon king Ravana. Hindus also celebrate Navaratri during this period. This is the festival of nine nights. For Bengalis from eastern India, Navaratri culminates in a grand celebration dedicated to the worship of the goddess Durga. (October-November).

Diwali

The festival of Lights follows shortly after Dussehra. This is a five-day festival when Hindus worship Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and beauty. Hindus observe Diwali by cleaning and illuminating their homes with lamps, wearing new clothes and exchanging sweets and other gifts.

Maha Shivaratri

A festival dedicated to the worship of the great god Shiva. Shiva worshippers observe a fast to mark Shivaratri and stay awake overnight to pray to Shiva. (January-February).

Holi

This is a spring festival, during which observers drench each other in water and smear coloured powder on one another's faces. It commemorates the death of Holika, who, according to popular myth, plotted to kill her nephew to punish him for his ardent devotion to the great god Vishnu. (February-March).

Sensitivities

Generalising

A common mistake made by Hindus and non-Hindus alike is to treat Hinduism as a unified category. The beliefs, practices, sensibilities and sensitivities of Hindus are in fact best understood not as representing 'Hinduism', but as reflective of the regional and linguistic background of the individuals concerned, their caste status and sectarian affiliation.

Conflating 'Hindu' with 'Indian'

Another mistake is to treat the categories 'Hindu' and 'Indian' as interchangeable. It is important to remember that not all Indians are Hindus. India has a sizeable non-Hindu population and not all Hindus are Indian.

Individualism versus family values

A potentially sensitive issue for some Hindus has to do with their sense of familial loyalty and bonding. Hindu children are often brought up to respect the authority of their parents. This can potentially put a constraint on their individualism and situations which require Hindu offspring to act contrary to the wishes of their parents may cause conflict.

Patriarchy

The status of women can also be a potentially sensitive issue for Hindus. Some Hindu communities in Britain tend to foster patriarchal values which can impose constraints on the female members.

Ideas of what it is to be a 'good' Hindu woman often revolve around themes of modesty and self-effacement, the preservation of a virginal status prior to marriage, obedience to one's parents, husband, and in-laws, chastity, a sacrificing spirit and selfless service to one's family. These characteristics may impact an individual's autonomy, interactions and ambitions in a workplace.

Whilst most second and third generation Hindu immigrants in Britain are increasingly autonomous in this regard, there remain some who are more conservative.

Ethics

Purity - Some Hindus may consider certain kinds of food and drink, such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, onion, garlic and alcohol, to be 'impure'. Vegetarian food is considered 'purer' than non-vegetarian food, therefore some castes and communities may follow a strictly vegetarian diet. Others will focus on dietary purity during certain phases of their life or on specific occasions. The majority of Hindus also consider the consumption of beef taboo, following from the Hindu belief that cows are sacred animals.

Sex - Considerations of purity may extend to sex prior to, or outside of, marriage. Children born out of wedlock may be treated as impure and therefore illegitimate. In many communities, female virginity and 'purity' prior to marriage tends to be highly valued.

Islam

At-a-glance

- The word Islam means 'submission to the will of God'.
- Islam is the second largest religion in the world with over 1 billion followers.
- Followers of Islam are called Muslims.
- Muslims believe that Islam was revealed over 1400 years ago in Mecca, Arabia.
- Muslims believe that there is only One God and the Arabic word for God is Allah.
- According to Muslims, God sent a number of prophets to mankind to teach them how to live according to his law. Jesus, Moses and Abraham are respected as prophets of God. They believe that the final Prophet was Muhammad.
- Muslims believe that Islam has always existed, but for practical purposes, date their religion from the time of the migration of Muhammad.
- Muslims base their laws on their holy book the Qur'an, the Sunnah and in some countries subsequent Hadith's from Islamic scholars.
- Muslims believe the Sunnah is the practical example of Prophet Muhammad and that there are five Pillars of Islam which must be adhered to. These are the declaration of one's faith, praying five times a day, giving reasonable earnings to charity (also known as 'Zakat') and if viable a pilgrimage to Mecca in a Muslim's lifetime.

Key dates in the Muslim calendar

There are two major festivals in Islam that all Muslims celebrate, Eid ul-Adha and Eid ul-Fitr. However, there are several others that are celebrated only by certain Muslim groups.

Eid ul-Adha

Eid-ul-Adha (the Festival of Sacrifice) is celebrated throughout the Muslim world as a commemoration of Prophet Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Ismail to God. It is celebrated on the 10th day of the month of Dhu al Hijja (12th month of the Muslim Lunar calendar). It celebrates the ending of the pilgrimage to Mecca, during which each pilgrim – or indeed any Muslim as is now commonly practiced - sacrifices (or has sacrificed on their behalf) a sheep, goat, cow or camel. This practice is often referred to as 'Qurbani'.

During Eid ul-Adha, communities decorate both their homes and streets. They also attend the formal Eid Prayer at Mosques, exchange gifts and participate in a celebratory meal. It is common practice for Muslim staff to ask for two to three days to celebrate this festival.

Eid ul-Fitr

Eid ul-Fitr marks the breaking of the fast on the first day after the month of Ramadan and continues for three days in a similar manner to Eid al-Adha. Many Muslim members of staff are likely to request the last few days of Ramadan as time off, to spend time in reflection with their families and prepare for the Eid celebrations.

Ramadan

Ramadan is the name of the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. Muslims believe it is the month during which the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad over 1400 years ago. Ramadan is the holiest month of the year for Muslims and it is considered that the reward of good deeds during this month are multiplied several-fold.

During Ramadan, from dawn until sunset, Muslims are obliged to abstain from all forms of food, drink (including water), smoking, immoral behaviours and thoughts and sex. Most Muslims will wake before dawn for a meal before the start of their fast and break their fast with dates and water at sunset. This is followed by a meal, often celebrated with extended family.

As a matter of simple courtesy non-Muslims may consider refraining from eating, drinking or smoking openly in the presence of Muslims who are fasting during the day in Ramadan. Where Ramadan falls during the winter months and the breaking of the fast is before the end of the working day, it is normal for Muslims who are fasting to wish to be able to break the fast and pray the sunset prayer at the appropriate time, and allowances should be made for this where possible.

Muslims who are fasting may have reduced energy and concentration may be impaired as the day progresses. For some, this could become more pronounced as the month goes on. This will be due to fasting and disrupted sleep patterns, as people tend to stay up late at night to socialise and wake up early for a predawn meal. It is good practice to take this into account and factor in flexibility where possible. However; the fasting period reduces in length slightly each day because of the lunar calendar.

Lailatul-mi'raj

Lailatul-mi'raj celebrates the night of the ascent, when the Prophet ascended to heaven. This festival occurs on the 27th day in the month of Rajab, the 7th month of the Islamic lunar calendar.

Muharram

The festival of Muharram celebrates the Islamic New Year's Day and is named after the first month of the Islamic calendar. This festival lasts for ten days. The first eight days are counted from New Year's Day. The last two days are celebrated through

fasting to celebrate the day Prophet Moses saved the people of Israel from the Pharaoh.

Al-Mawlid-an-Nabawi

Al-Mawlid-an-Nabawi celebrates the Birthday of the Prophet Muhammad. He was born on the morning of the 12th day in the month of Rabi' alAwwal, the 3rd month of the Islamic year. According to the Gregorian calendar, this would be August 20th, 570 AD. The Prophet died 63 years later on the same day. This day may be celebrated with parties and other gatherings.

Ethics

Modesty and sex - Islam forbids absolutely any sexual activity before marriage. In addition to that, Islam also has a strong view of 'indecent' behaviours, for example any activity that would that involve close contact between men and women.

This idea may extend to views around modesty and avoiding clothes that are revealing.

Language - Obscene language and swearing may be offensive to Muslim staff.

Alcohol – Muslims are not permitted to consume alcohol or other intoxicants that interfere with the clear functioning of the mind. Some Muslims will prefer to avoid gatherings that involve the consumption of alcohol. It is good practice for workplaces to provide appropriate beverages at gatherings where Muslim staff may be in attendance.

Sexual orientation – Many Islamic scholars agree that the religion forbids same sex relationships. Consequently, many Muslims feel strongly on this issue.

Food – Many Muslims follow a strict dietary law, which means that pork is prohibited in any form or food that has come in to contact with pork products. Products containing blood are also prohibited.

Halal meat must be slaughtered in a certain way and the blood removed. For employers accommodating this, an Arabic symbol can be found on most Halal products in the UK and most of Europe.

Most seafood and all vegetables are permissible.

Dress code - Islam does not recommend a particular style of dress for men and women. Therefore, Islamic dress should not be confused with traditional clothing according to an individual's ethnic background or personal taste.

From a modesty perspective, men should cover their body from the navel to the knees and they are not allowed to wear pure silk or gold items.

Many Muslim women choose to wear a headscarf, often referred to as the Hijab. The majority of Muslim scholars of both genders believe that according to the Islamic sources, women are to cover their whole body with clothes, except their face, hands and feet, when outside the immediate family circle. They do not need to be covered when they are in exclusively female company, nor in the company of male family members within the degrees of relationship that prohibit marriage (i.e. father, grandfather, brother, son and uncle). Some Muslim women choose to cover their face with the niqab, a veil that covers the face except for the eyes. It is important to note that there are also many Muslim women who choose not to wear the Hijab in the UK, as it is often also culturally significant for some ethnicities.

Islamophobia

What is Islamophobia?

Broadly speaking 'Islamophobia' is discrimination, prejudice or hostility against Muslims. The term began to enter public consciousness in the UK in the late 1980s as a way of signalling a rejection of the growing Muslim population. However, in 1997, a report by the Runnymede Trust and another by the Commission on British Muslims, were pivotal in raising new social and political awareness of prejudice against Islam and Muslims in Britain.

Both reports broadly defined Islamophobia as 'unfounded hostility towards Islam' resulting in discriminatory attitudes and behaviours towards Muslims. Since 1997, debates and research have tried to tease out the distinction between 'Islamophobia', (which suggests there is only one interpretation of 'Islam' and implies a 'fear' of the religion), and a broader based prejudice towards Muslim communities.

The common usage of the term 'Islamophobia' means it is now often used as shorthand for any form of anti-Muslim feeling, hatred or discrimination. Using the term in this way means that perpetrators of this behaviour will sometimes defend their views by asserting their right to have negative views of Islam. This can create further tensions and sensitivities around the use of the term, which it is advisable to use only in the relevant context.

The components of 'Islamophobia'

The Runnymede Trust Report identified some common threads that underpin narratives around 'Islamophobia', these include views of Islam as:

- Monolithic and static, therefore unresponsive to progress.
- Separate and other, sharing no common values with other cultures.
- Inferior, irrational, primitive and sexist.

- Violent, aggressive, supportive of terrorism and engaged in a clash of civilisations.
- A manipulative political ideology that is used for political or military advantage.
- Offering unjustified criticisms of the West that do not merit debate.
- A source of justified discrimination and exclusion of Muslim people.
- As being a natural/normal target of criticism.

Prevalence

The rise of 'Islamophobia' has been strongly interconnected with geopolitical events such as 9/11, the 2005 London bombings, the 2013 Woolwich incident and the ongoing conflict in Syria. Research shows that experiences of racism and 'Islamophobia' increase shortly after these events before declining gradually.

In addition, the tone of reporting of these events in the mainstream media has been shown to contribute to the negative stereotyping of Muslims.

Tell MAMA (Measuring anti-Muslim Attacks), a reporting service for individuals experiencing anti-Muslim hate incidents, reported 1,128 incidents during 2015. A significant proportion of these incidents occurred both in-person and on-line. 61% of these incidents involved Muslim women, 75% of which were visibly Muslim. For Muslim men, reported visible markers which increased the likelihood of experiencing 'Islamophobia' included having a beard, brown skin or wearing the traditional dress 'Shalwar Kameez'.

Manifestations

'Islamophobic' incidents include verbal abuse, physical assault and threatening behaviour.

Physically aggressive forms of Islamophobia include outright extreme violence, through to incidents such as head scarfs being pulled off by fellow passengers on public transport. Verbal abuse includes name-calling, taunting or individuals being made the subject of jokes and racially based 'banter' in public.

Subtle forms of 'Islamophobia' include forms of avoidance and exclusion, such as being stared at, not having someone sit next to you on the bus or experiencing a general sense of social distance.

Online 'Islamophobia' is prevalent on social media sites.

Incidents are not restricted to specific places. They can occur in schools, colleges, workplaces, Mosques, neighbourhoods, public spaces and at airports.

It is not only Muslims who are targeted by 'Islamophobia'. A diverse range of people from different ethnic and religious minorities also encounter it daily, mostly as a result of people assuming they are Muslim. Sikhs, Hindus, other South Asians, those with African heritages and even some central and eastern European migrants be targeted.

Alongside this, there is good evidence to show that Muslims are subject to greater surveillance and profiling by the security services than members of other world religions, making contemporary Britain a more challenging place to live as a Muslim.

In the workplace

The Social Mobility Commission research, 2017, found that despite a strong work ethic and high resilience amongst Muslims leading to impressive results in education, only 6% of Muslims found employment in professional occupations, compared with 10% of the overall population in England and Wales.

The study found 19.8% of Muslims aged 16-to-74 were in full-time employment, compared with 34.9% of the overall population. From a social mobility perspective this is particularly concerning given that 50% of Muslim households are in poverty, compared with less than 20% in the overall population. The research also highlighted routine examples of Muslim men and women failing to secure jobs that were commensurate with their skills and qualifications.

Judaism

At a glance

- Judaism is the original of the three Abrahamic faiths, which also includes Christianity and Islam.
- According to the 2011 census, there were 263,346 Jews living in England and Wales.
- Judaism originated in the Middle East over 3500 years ago and was founded by Moses, although Jews trace their history back to Abraham.
- Jews believe that there is only one God with whom they have a covenant.
- In exchange for all the good that God has done, Jewish people keep to God's laws and try to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives.
- Judaism has a rich history of religious text, but the central and most important religious document is the Torah.
- Spiritual leaders are called Rabbis and Jews worship in Synagogues.
- 6 million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust in a genocidal attempt to wipe out Judaism.
- There are many people who identify themselves as Jewish without necessarily believing in, or observing, any Jewish law.
- Judaism is also recognised as a race under the Equality Act of 2010

Key dates in the Jewish calendar

The Jewish calendar is lunar. There are thirteen months in the religious year and festivals occur on certain days on these months. Consequently, the Jewish festivals do not occur on the same date in the secular calendar each year. There are five festivals where Jews are forbidden to work.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur

Rosh Hashanah occurs in the autumn and marks the Jewish new year. It is followed ten days later by the most solemn day of the year Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. On both days, religious Jews spend the day in the Synagogue, praying, repenting of sin and getting their lives in order. On the Day of Atonement, religious Jews fast completely from sunset to sunset to atone for past wrongdoing. These solemn days are widely observed, and many Jewish colleagues will take the days off work.

The three pilgrim festivals

In ancient times Jews would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate the following three festivals:

- Passover (Pesach) is in the spring.
- Pentecost (Shavuot) occurs seven weeks later.
- Tabernacles (Succoth) takes place in the autumn.

All these festivals are agricultural in origin, but they also commemorate important events in Jewish history. There are ancient rituals connected with them. Notably, Passover is the most widely celebrated, often within the family home. Although many Jews will take leave for some or all of these five festivals, observance will vary widely. Additionally, Jews belonging to more Orthodox traditions may ask to take extra leave around the key festivals, if the important dates do not fall on a weekend.

There are many other Jewish fasts and feasts besides the above, such as the Feast of Esther (Purim), the Feast of Lights (Hanukkah) and the Fast of Av, but none of these necessitates time off work.

Ethics

The sabbath - Jews gave the idea of a regular, weekly day off to the world. The Jewish Sabbath is the seventh day of the week, Saturday. It begins on Friday evening at sunset and it ends a little more than 24 hours later on Saturday evening when it is dark.

Observant Jews observe the Sabbath by avoiding any form of work, including driving cars (which means they have to live within walking distance of a Synagogue). Domestic chores are done in advance, the family spends the day together, sharing meals, entertaining guests, talking, reading, attending services and enjoying each other's company.

Although Sabbath occurs weekly, for observant Jews its strict observance is key, so it will be important to consider this when scheduling important work meetings. In particular during the winter months as the sun sets earlier. In the UK and observant Jews will want to be at home to prepare for the Sabbath by 4pm on a Friday.

Food - In brief, for those who are observant, it is forbidden to eat birds of prey, shellfish and animals which do not both chew the cud and have a cloven hoof. Animals must be slaughtered in a certain way by qualified slaughterers. Additionally, meat-based products must not be mixed with milk-based foods. For some, this may include the use of separate cutlery and utensils.

Consequently, very Orthodox Jews will only eat food which has been inspected and prepared within their own community. This may mean that they will bring their own food into work and will not share food with others. Less observant Jews may not keep Kosher at all or have a less strict approach to the laws above, so it is best to check if in doubt.

During Passover, observant Jews will not eat bread, or anything made with flour.

Dress

The appearance of many Jews will be indistinguishable from their non-Jewish counterparts. However, the strictly Orthodox may be distinguished by their dress. Jewish men often wear skull caps at all times and the women may be dressed modestly (for example sleeves which cover the elbow, skirts which cover the knee).

Gender and sexuality – Traditionally, Judaism is a patriarchal religion with clearly defined roles for men and women. These divisions remain among the strictly Orthodox where women's lives may revolve around domesticity and child-rearing. Staff from these communities may be reluctant to shake hands with other genders and if working in pairs may prefer to do so with someone of the same gender.

However, in recent decades attitudes have been shifting within the mainstream Jewish community. Since 1972 there have been both female and male Rabbis. Equity has been reached regarding higher education and professional occupation attainment amongst female and male Jews in the UK. Traditionally there has been a strong disapproval of inter-marriage, but today in the UK more than 50% of young Jews choose non-Jews as marriage partners, contributing to a general shift away from traditional practices and attitudes.

Sexual orientation - Traditional Jewish law makes it clear that same sex relationships are prohibited. However, nowadays the majority of Jews in the UK reject this teaching for the most part.

Antisemitism

What is antisemitism?

Antisemitism can be defined as discrimination, prejudice or hostility against Jews. History shows that increases in antisemitism often reflect growing extremism or division within a society. Like many forms of racism, overt antisemitism is less common nowadays. However, there has been a large growth in the use of conspiracy theories and open anti-Jewish hatred online.

Antisemitism is strongly associated with the Nazi Holocaust in Germany. However, it has been seen to take many other forms, including religious, ethnic, racial-biological and nationalist.

Typical acts of antisemitism portray victims as lowly, inhumane and worthless. Others portray Jews as cunning and all-powerful liars and manipulators. Today, these themes are also found in the narrative around 'Zionists' and the 'Jewish lobby', worsened by socio-political tensions in Israel. This type of racism can be more difficult to define. However, Jewish institutions have repeatedly stressed that criticism of Israeli policy which avoids antisemitic narratives is unlikely to be antisemitic.

How is antisemitism defined?

It is interesting phenomena in itself that many bodies have tried to undermine Jewish perceptions and definitions of anti-Semitism, unlike for example the experiences of other victims of racism.

In 2017, the UK Government moved to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism.

“Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.”¹

The full definition also includes examples of incidents that could, taking into account the overall context, be deemed antisemitic.

Prevalence

The Community Security Trust (CST) has been recording incidents since the 1980s and only accounts for cases where there is some evidence of antisemitic language, motivation or targeting. Records show there has been an upward trend in incidence, with an increase in hostile discourse online being a large contributor. In the first six months of 2019, 892 antisemitic incidents were recorded across the UK, the highest ever total. The second highest figure was recorded in 2018 when a total of 1,688 antisemitic incidents were reported for the full 12-month period.

In 2017 the CST and Institute for Jewish Policy Research (JPR), produced a report on anti-Semitism in Great Britain based on key findings from a survey of attitudes towards Jews and the Israeli State. Evidence revealed that 2-5% of the UK population are consciously hostile and antisemitic. Moreover, antisemitic themes and ideas resonated with as much as 30% of society. This suggests that the chance of the Jewish population encountering antisemitic behaviour or views is relatively high. Indeed, the large level of support for an open antisemitic letter on Facebook in March 2018, suggests the problem may be larger than previously anticipated. The level of anti-Semitism witnessed online indicates that there is now an established culture of a type of overt anti-Semitism more prevalent than it has been for decades in the UK.

Manifestation

Anti-Semitism can be overt, obvious and easy to recognise. For example, female Jewish MPs being bombarded on social media with thousands of messages targeting them as ‘Jewish b*****’ alongside offensive pictures. It can also be

¹ Antisemitism Policy Trust *IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism* <https://www.antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/IHRA-Briefing-19-09-2019.pdf>

violently manifested, such as the physical attacks targeting those in mainland Europe.

Contemporary discursive anti-Semitism normally manifests differently, relying on classic antisemitic themes. These narratives can include the manipulation of governments by powerful Jewish groups and the corruption of MPs if they take a pro-Israel stance.

Those accused of antisemitism will typically reject the charge and turn on their accusers claiming deception for political purposes. This dynamic plays out differently from accusations of other forms of racism and needs to be understood to avoid falling into this trap.

Sikhism

At-a-glance

- There are 27 million Sikhs in the world, most of whom live in the Punjab province of India and Pakistan.
- Sikhism is also considered to be a race under the Equality Act of 2010.
- The 2011 census recorded 432,000 Sikhs in the UK.
- Sikhism was founded in the 16th century in the Punjab, a district which is in both India and Pakistan. It was founded by Guru Nanak and is based on his teachings, and those of the 9 Sikh gurus who followed him.
- Sikhs believe in one God and the religion stresses the importance of carrying out sound moral deeds, rather than merely conforming to ritualistic norms and values.
- The most important thing in Sikhism is the internal religious state of the individual. The way to lead a good life is to: always keep God in the heart and mind, live honestly and work hard. Also, to treat everyone equally, be generous to the less fortunate and serve others.
- The Sikh place of worship is called a Gurdwara, with the largest in Britain located in Sandwell, West Midlands.
- The Sikh scripture is the Guru Granth Sahib.
- Guru Gobind Singh decreed that where Sikhs could not find answers in the Guru Granth Sahib, they should reach consensus on issues as a community, based on the principles of their scripture.
- Devout Sikhs show their commitment through the Five Ks or panj kakke. These five symbols are required of both men and women and include: Kesh—uncut hair, Kangha—wooden comb worn in the hair, Kara—steel or silver wristband, Kirpan—sword and Kach—special shorts which are worn as an undergarment.
- The code of discipline for devout Sikhs is the Rahit Maryada. Key beliefs and practices include; believing only in the teachings of the ten Gurus, reciting morning and evening prayer daily, attendance at the Gurdwara, the prohibition of tobacco, intoxicants, adultery and the consumption of animals which have been slaughtered in a sacrificial way e.g. Halal and Kosher products.

Key dates in the Sikh calendar

Until 2003, the Sikh calendar was based upon the Hindu calendar, with most festivals dependent on the lunar rather than secular calendar. From that date onwards, the Nanakshahi calendar was authorised in Amritsar for use worldwide and now the majority of festivals have dates that are consistent with the secular calendar. Only three celebrations continue to reflect the Hindu calendar:

- Hola Mahalla falls in March (the day after the Hindu festival of Holi mentioned above).

- Diwali or Bandi Chhor Divas is celebrated in late October or early November.
- Guru Nanak's Birthday is celebrated in November.

Regarding the other festivals, the following are especially important:

- Guru Gobind Singh's Birthday – 5th of January.
- Vaisakhi/Baisakhi, the anniversary of the Khalsa - 14th of April.
- Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev – 16th of June.
- Martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadar – 24th of November.

The festivals are chiefly celebrated in Gurdwaras, Vaisakhi and the Birthdays of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh can involve street processions. A continuous reading of the Guru Granth Sahib commences 48 hours beforehand, culminating with congregational worship on the morning of the festival day. The festivals do not involve the giving of presents.

Ethics

Gender

Sikhs do not tend to seek segregation of the sexes and often proudly point to gender equality in their community. It is certainly true that the Gurus' teaching honours women and that women can publicly read the scriptures just as men can. But, in traditional Sikh communities, it is common for girl's behaviour - especially mixing with the opposite sex - to be more closely supervised. Alongside this there may be a greater expectation that they will learn domestic skills.

Marriage and relationships

Family honour continues to be a guiding concern in Sikh families. The opposite is of course shame and disgrace. Over the centuries, families have felt the greatest dishonour when the reputation of their daughters is at stake. For this reason, Sikh women may be acutely anxious about any gossip getting back to their families or social circles. Significantly, many Sikhs continue to conform to ideals surrounding abstinence before marriage and only marrying into families which meet with family approval. However, it is interesting to note that methods of finding appropriate partners are changing. In addition to introductions via family friends and to meeting one's partner without such assistance, there are now specialist dating agencies.

In most cases, same sex relationships are unlikely to be acknowledged or approved of by traditional Sikh families, although there is an increasing awareness of the fact that some individuals in society are gay.

Alcohol and smoking

Some Sikhs of both sexes will strictly abstain from both alcohol and smoking. They may also be uncomfortable in social situations where these are prominent.

Diet

Devout Sikhs may be strictly vegetarian, including no cheese and egg-based products.

Family ties

In common with others from South Asian backgrounds, Sikhs may have strong bonds with relatives, including with their extended kin. The importance of this is highlighted here for employers, to indicate that it is agreeable to permit days of absence for events for the extended kin group such as funerals.

Racism

Additional to the racism (overt or otherwise) experienced by members of other minorities, male Sikhs with turbans and beards have become more vulnerable to abuse (and occasionally violence). Some hypothesis that this is in direct correlation to the rise of Islamophobia, as they are mistakenly identified as Muslim. Consequently, in both Britain and mainland Europe, Sikhs continue to be subjected to verbal abuse.

Building a faith-inclusive workplace

Steps towards building a faith-inclusive workplace

Below we have provided a brief guide on key issues and actions that employers can take to promote faith inclusion in the workplace.

1. A strategic view

The Faith Research Centre has developed a helpful process to guide a strategic approach to addressing religious or faith inclusion in the workplace, which could be applied to any culture change project:

- **Audit** your current level of understanding, awareness and ability to serve your various stakeholders using surveys, focus groups and consultations (with any existing groups or networks if you have them).
- **Activate** simple and effective changes to deliver significant improvements.
- **Assess** the differences you observe in workplace relationships and employee satisfaction as a result of your journey.
- **Adjust** to refine your practice and develop your understanding of your market.

2. Key areas to explore

Below are crucial areas to examine and consider when developing a strategy to promote faith inclusion in the workplace:

Leadership

To support inclusion around religion and belief, leaders must be able to clearly define the business reasons and the expected benefits. They must role model desired behaviours, deal with issues in the appropriate manner and remove barriers that hinder progress.

Some staff may be uncomfortable with religious inclusion and it is critical that leaders are non-judgemental and relaxed about this. Also, it is advisable to anticipate for challenges at the start of the process.

Attitude adjustment

Certain expressions of religious faith will be more compatible with existing organisational cultures than others. Therefore, it will be important to prepare should staff wish to demonstrate their beliefs in less familiar ways or those that might be more uncomfortable for others.

The organisation needs to demonstrate and role model that it is willing to listen and engage on topics that are unfamiliar and that might challenge traditional and accepted organisational norms.

Collaborative conversations

Of all the diversity characteristics, faith and belief tends to be the one we talk about least. Many people feel uncomfortable talking about their faith or belief - partly because it's a private matter, partially because of potential stigma and also because it can be controversial. Equally, asking others about their faith can also feel difficult – questions around faith can risk being intrusive, patronising or indeed ignorant.

A critical way to facilitate respect as well as comfort and trust in sharing who we are at work, is through supporting greater awareness and understanding. Learning about and sharing the religious beliefs and practices of staff will aid this. Additionally, creating opportunities for staff from different religious groups to share experiences can reinforce these mechanisms and be particularly valuable if the business has global reach.

Exploring issues which might relate to beliefs that lie at the heart of individual or group identity can be challenging, so they need to be approached with care and respect. Nevertheless, encouraging discussion and engagement between groups can be highly beneficial, because it allows the diverse experiences and opinions to be explored and common ground to be identified. An emphasis on shared history and parallel experiences promotes tolerance and understanding while not denying the separate identities of each group. Potential tensions can be explored without directly confronting issues that may lead to argument or hostility. A number of resources to support multi-faith dialogue are listed in the Useful Resources section.

Celebrate

In addition to the above, events that showcase different faiths and promote dialogue that helps to celebrate common and shared values, regardless of background, religion or belief system are highly valuable. Involving local community groups in these activities can be an effective way of making strong and valuable links to support the organisations ongoing inclusion programme.

Policies and guidance

In 2017, research by the Faith and Research Centre indicated that employees tended to have low awareness of what was on offer to support faith inclusion at work. Alongside this, the research demonstrated that where an organisation had a policy in place, HR managers are more likely to feel confident in dealing with and agreeing to requests.

This suggests that written policies and procedures which include information on legal obligations, key sensitivities and how to make the necessary accommodations, need to be widely available and communicated to all. Moreover, training, a clear complaint procedure that protects privacy, immediate and thorough investigation, prompt action when warranted and a system of checks and balances to ensure compliance are also viewed as critical elements in an overall religion in the workplace program.

Nonetheless, even with all the right policies and procedures in place, the true hallmark of compliance is found in the ability to work out accommodations on an individual basis. It takes time but can prevent the high cost of defending a discrimination charge.

Balancing competing demands

It's important to consider where someone's religious beliefs may challenge another person's belief or identity, especially if this has legal implications. Inclusive workplaces welcome and encourage religious beliefs and expression but should not be a place for proselytising. Equally, colleagues may have deeply held religious beliefs but express those beliefs in a way that is harmful to others and could create discomfort in the workplace or indeed breach anti-discrimination laws. Here, it is important to be clear that colleagues can hold certain beliefs in private. However, they are not at liberty to express them in the workplace if they are contrary to organisational policy, discrimination law and the protections of others.

Providing accommodations

A clear policy on how to respond to, assess and put in place accommodations will be key in supporting managers and HR colleagues to promote inclusion and ensure fairness.

When providing accommodations, it will be important to adopt an appropriate mindset. Key considerations include:

1. Case by case approach - There isn't no 'one-size-fits-all' approach, religious practices vary within religions and cultures, so where possible take steps to address individual needs and circumstances.

2. Positive intent - Never dismiss a staff member's request even if their religion, belief or practices are unfamiliar to you.

3. Sensitive questions – Ideally, providing religious accommodations should be conducted as a dialogue in which employees and employers work together to find practical and sustainable solutions. However, not all employees will feel comfortable to raise matters directly. Therefore, managers should ask respectful questions to understand more about the employee's practices and beliefs to reach accommodation solutions that are mutually beneficial.

4. Business need – It might not always be straightforward to respond to a request, especially if the staff member is in a small/specialist team/business, works in a front facing 24/7 service, or when the request involves a change to their role requirements. Subsequently, an employer must consider the request carefully. This may mean they are not able to agree to the request if it is due to genuine, legitimate

business reasons. However, it will be important not to turn down a request without first getting specialist advice and exploring all appropriate options.

5. Creativity – If there are challenges, take time to think creatively about the ways in which the needs of the employee and the business can be met. This will increase the chance of finding a solution and demonstrates your commitment to religious inclusion in the workplace.

6. Learning from experience – Where practical and creative solutions are identified, track and share these across the organisation. Also, develop ways that the learning can become institutionalised and part and parcel of existing policy or practice. This will save time and money next time the same or a similar issue is raised again.

Accommodations checklists

The following resource reference is for a useful checklist covering the range of religious accommodations that might be considered in the workplace

A religious diversity checklist – Tannenbaum Centre for Interreligious Understanding
<https://tanenbaum.org/programs/workplace/workplace-resources/religious-diversity-checklist/>

Useful resources

Inclusive Employers resources Free to members and available by emailing:
info@inclusiveemployers.co.uk

Christmas package

Diwali fact sheet

Guide to inclusive events

Hanukkah fact sheet

Multi-faith room guidance

Ramadan package

Rosh Hashana fact sheet

Other resources

Religious festivals calendar – The Inter Faith network
<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/religious-festivals>

Religious days of observance fact sheets - Tannenbaum Centre for Interreligious Understanding
<https://tanenbaum.org/programs/workplace/workplace-resources/>

Religion and belief discrimination: key points for the workplace - ACAS
Website <https://archive.acas.org.uk/religionorbelief>
Guide <https://archive.acas.org.uk/media/5876/Religion-or-belief-discrimination-key-points-for-the-workplace/pdf/Religion-or-belief-discrimination-key-points-for-the-workplace.pdf>

10 Bias danger areas for religious inclusion - Tannenbaum Centre for Interreligious Understanding
<https://tanenbaum.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/10-Bias-Danger-Signs-Definitions.pdf>

Working definition of antisemitism - International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance
definition of Antisemitism <https://www.antisemitism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/IHRA-Briefing-19-09-2019.pdf>

Facilitating multi-faith conversations

Building good relations between people of different religions and faiths - The Inter Faith Network
<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/building-good-relations-with-people-of-different-faiths-and-beliefs>

Let's talk: Practical pointers for interfaith dialogue – The Inter Faith Network
<https://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/lets-talk-practical-pointers-for-inter-faith-dialogue>

A guide to public conversations dialogue – The Public Conversations Project
Dialogue is a method to enable people to talk constructively and reach compromise on topics which are deeply divisive as linked to core identity or values
https://www.civicus.org/documents/toolkits/PGX_D_Public%20Conversations.pdf