



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council



Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

RELIGION & BELIEF LITERACY **TOOLKIT**

Key Objectives

1

Raised awareness, knowledge and understanding of cutting edge thinking about contemporary religion and belief, as a basis for policy-making.

2

Increased engagement by policy makers, together with practitioners, around religion and belief issues in public spaces via this new framework document for local policy development.

3

Discussion of the deeper issues and questions concerning the place and contribution of lived religion and belief in the public sphere, that will both critique but also intentionally complement current policies in this area (i.e. Prevent and Protect).

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WHY SHOULD WE PAY ATTENTION TO RELIGION AND BELIEF: THE EVIDENCE BASE

The Evidence Base

Recent research in health and social care reveals that whilst professionals and their settings are required by law and/or professional codes to give attention to religion, belief and spirituality across health and social care, these terms are largely undefined or operationalised. As a result, they tend to 'stay on the page' and rarely translate into practice, despite good intentions.

Key recent work leading to the current guidance for policy makers includes:



Crisp B and Dinham A (2019) Are the Profession's Education Standards Promoting the Religious Literacy Required for Twenty-First Century Social Work Practice? *British Journal of Social Work*: OUP vol 49 Issue 6 pp1544-1562

ABSTRACT: This article analyses regulations and standards which frame social work and social care education and practice across English-speaking countries including the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, India, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa and the United States, as well as the

Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession. All documents were keyword searched and also read in their entirety. Religion and belief appear briefly and incoherently and are often deprioritised, unless particularly problematic. There is a common elision of religion, belief and spirituality, often expressed in the designation 'religion/spirituality'. References to religion and belief, and their inclusion and removal, are recognisably subject to debates between policy-makers who frame the guidelines. This makes them issues of agency which might themselves benefit from analysis. Religion and belief are frequently addressed only in the context of overarching frameworks such as 'anti-oppressive' or 'anti-discriminatory' practice. Yet such proxies may prove merely apologetic and result in standards which aim only to establish what is the minimum required. It is hard to argue that religious literacy has been a priority in English-speaking social work countries, though new law and emerging best practice may make it so.



Crisp B and Dinham A (2019b) Do the Regulatory Standards Require Religious Literacy of Health and Social Care Professionals? Social Policy and Administration, Wiley Blackwell, vol 53 Issue 7 pp1081-1094

ABSTRACT: Health and social care professionals need sufficient religious literacy in order to handle the complexities of religious beliefs and practices, including the growing numbers who identify with other belief systems and those who claim to identify with no religion. The extent to which the need for religious literacy has been formalised was examined in an analysis of regulatory frameworks for health and social care professionals in the UK. Although all but one of the regulators make some reference to religion or beliefs, they are silent on the question of what is meant by religion and beliefs. Some standards include a requirement not to impose one's own beliefs on others, but there is very little requirement to develop a reflective, self-critical awareness of one's own stance. Likewise, some standards refer to knowledge and skills required but greater specificity is required for these requirements to be meaningful.



Crisp B and Dinham A (2019c) The Role of Occupational Standards in Workplace Religious Literacy, Journal of Beliefs and Values DOI: 10.1080/13617672.2019.1672437

ABSTRACT: This paper explored the UK National Occupational Standards to identify the breadth of health and social care occupations for which it has been determined that workers need some degree of religious literacy. A total of 465 standards documents which mention religion and beliefs, relating to a diverse range of occupations were retrieved, of which 13 had a primary focus on religion and beliefs.

Approximately 60 percent of these standards noted the need for knowledge about religion and beliefs, though only a quarter of these specified actual performance criteria. With some exceptions, most of the standards were vague as to what is meant by religion, with very few attempts to define their terms. A lack of specificity renders the inclusion of references to religion largely tokenistic rather than reflecting a measure of religious literacy which could be practically deployed.



Crisp B and Dinham A (2019d) Are Codes of Ethics Promoting Religious Literacy for Social Work Practice? Australian Social Work, Melbourne: Taylor Francis doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2019.1698628

The Evidence Base

ABSTRACT: As codes of ethics play at least a symbolic, if not educational, role in highlighting and informing professional priorities, 16 codes of ethics for social work and social care practice were examined for references to religion and belief, and analysed against the four domains of Dinham's religious literacy framework.

Although religion and belief are mentioned in all but two of the documents, approximately half the surveyed codes only mention religion and belief in respect of either knowledge or skills. Some recognise the need for social workers to be aware of their own biases, but very few recognise the need to explain what is meant by religion and belief, despite (or perhaps because of) these terms being in flux. While codes of ethics can contribute to the development of religious literacy among social workers, this requires social workers who already have some religious literacy to actively participate when codes of ethics are being revised.



Dinham A (2018) Religion and Belief in Health and Social Care: the case for Religious Literacy, International Journal of Human Rights in Healthcare vol 11 no 1, Emerald Insight

ABSTRACT: Drawing on original research and analysis in UK higher education settings, the article shows why health and social care educators, policy makers and practitioners need to develop their religious literacy in order to engage fully and competently with the religion and belief identities of their service users in a religiously diverse and complex society. The relationship between religion and belief on the one hand and health and social care practice on the other has been scarcely addressed, despite the important work of Furness and Gilligan in the UK, Canada and the USA. Their work appears as exceptional within a wider context of professions which have been forged in a predominantly secular milieu, despite often having their roots in Christian social services.

New research in the sociology of religion shows that religions and beliefs themselves vary in form, number and mix around the world, and that the religious landscape itself has changed enormously in recent

The Evidence Base

years, during which secular social work has itself been changing significantly.

It has been observed that in the UK secular assumptions reached a peak of confidence in the 1960s, when health and social care were most rapidly consolidating as public profession (Dinham 2015). The inheritance has been generations of health and social care practitioners and educators who are ill-equipped to address the religion and belief identities which they encounter. In recent years this has become a pressing issue as societies across the West come to terms with the persistent and in some ways growing – presence of religion or belief, against secular expectations which imagined a steady and irreversible decline in religious belief.

In total, 84 per cent of the global population declares a religious affiliation (Pew, 2012); globalisation and migration put us all in daily encounter with religious plurality as citizens, neighbours, service users and professionals; and internationally, mixed economies of welfare increasingly involve faith groups in service provision, including in social work

and welfare settings across Europe and North America. Yet the twentieth century – the secular century – leaves behind a lamentable quality of conversation about religion and belief. Public professionals find themselves precarious and unbriefed on the subject, and largely unable to engage systematically and informedly with religion and belief as they encounter them.

The Evidence Base

Religions and Belief Landscape

RELIGIONS
AND BELIEF
LANDSCAPE

Religion in the United Kingdom is highly diverse and plural. It is a difficult task to provide a concise summary of the multiple traditions and practices that are present in this country, whilst still remaining attentive to differences within and between religious communities.

Religions are dynamic and they respond and adapt to different contexts and times. They are not isolated, in time or by geography, and religious practices are shaped by individual communities and spiritual leaders as well as wider geo-political and cultural events.



With these provisos in mind, this resource provides an overview picture of the multi-faceted religious landscape of the United Kingdom, with particular attention to some of the changes that have been noted in religious affiliation over the past decades.

This resource principally draws on publicly available statistical data.



However, it is important to recognise that whilst high-level statistics tell us useful information about religious affiliation and change on a large scale, they do not give us the local details and 'lived' experience that social care practitioners need to be aware of in order to understand the religious landscape of the people and communities they work with on a daily basis.

First, a word on definitions.

- * Despite the Equality Act's best attempts, when we talk about 'religion' it is clear from academic, policy and popular writing that there is no one universally accepted definition of religion.**
- * For some, religion is intricately linked to the existence of God or Gods; for others, the concept relates primarily to philosophical meaning-making and the big questions of life (Why are we here? What happens after we die?). Some view religion as a means to connect an individual to 'something bigger than themselves.'**
- * Religion can be institutionally and structurally mandated (through a Church, mosque or temple, religious leaders and sacred texts) whilst also incorporating harder to pin down feelings of spirituality, connection and transcendence which may not neatly map out onto the practices and teachings of faith institutions.**

* Some people may not associate with a particular church or religious institution, but may feel strongly about the existence of angels or spirits, or might describe themselves as 'spiritual but not religious'.

* Others might see religion as something that is very carefully controlled by particular spiritual leaders and teachers. For others, 'religion' could even encompass secular activities, such as football.

Religions and Belief Landscape



Social Care practitioners are best served with a definition of religion that is deliberately broad, in order to incorporate the panoply of beliefs, institutions and practices that one might come across in day to day practice. This may be different to your own personal view of what religion is, but allowing more fluidity in your understanding of the term will enable better engagement with those who might not share your perspectives.

Although there may be some similarities between religious traditions and commonly shared values, there are also key differences between and within religious groups, sects and denominations.

Not every individual who shares the same religious affiliation will think the same. There are strident debates within faith communities about certain issues (on gender and sexuality equalities issues, for example) as well as between them, and therefore it is very important not to make assumptions about 'religious perspectives' without being attuned to the diversity that is present on the ground.

Religion in the UK: Statistics

The research field is complex and messy but we can draw on three main sources of data – Pew Foundation (annual), UK Census (every 10 years), and British Social Attitudes Survey (annual). They use different timescales and methodologies so the numbers do not line up identically. But the trends are clear – less Anglican and Catholic Christianity, more Pentecostal Christianity, more non-Christian traditional ('world') religions, and MUCH more 'no religion' (somewhere between 25 and 52% now). Within that 'no religion' category there is much debate about what is going on, but the consensus is that 'no religion' nevertheless includes many 'new forms' of belief.

If you examine the Census statistics more closely, a trend for more women than men to claim religious affiliation is apparent, alongside a general trend for younger people to be non-religious.



The 2015–17 surveys conducted by the Pew Forum gave the following results:

The United Kingdom is the

29th
34

most religious out of

European countries.

11%

in the United Kingdom are highly religious, based on an overall index.

10%

say religion is very important in their lives.

20%

say they attend religious services at least monthly.

6%

say they pray daily.

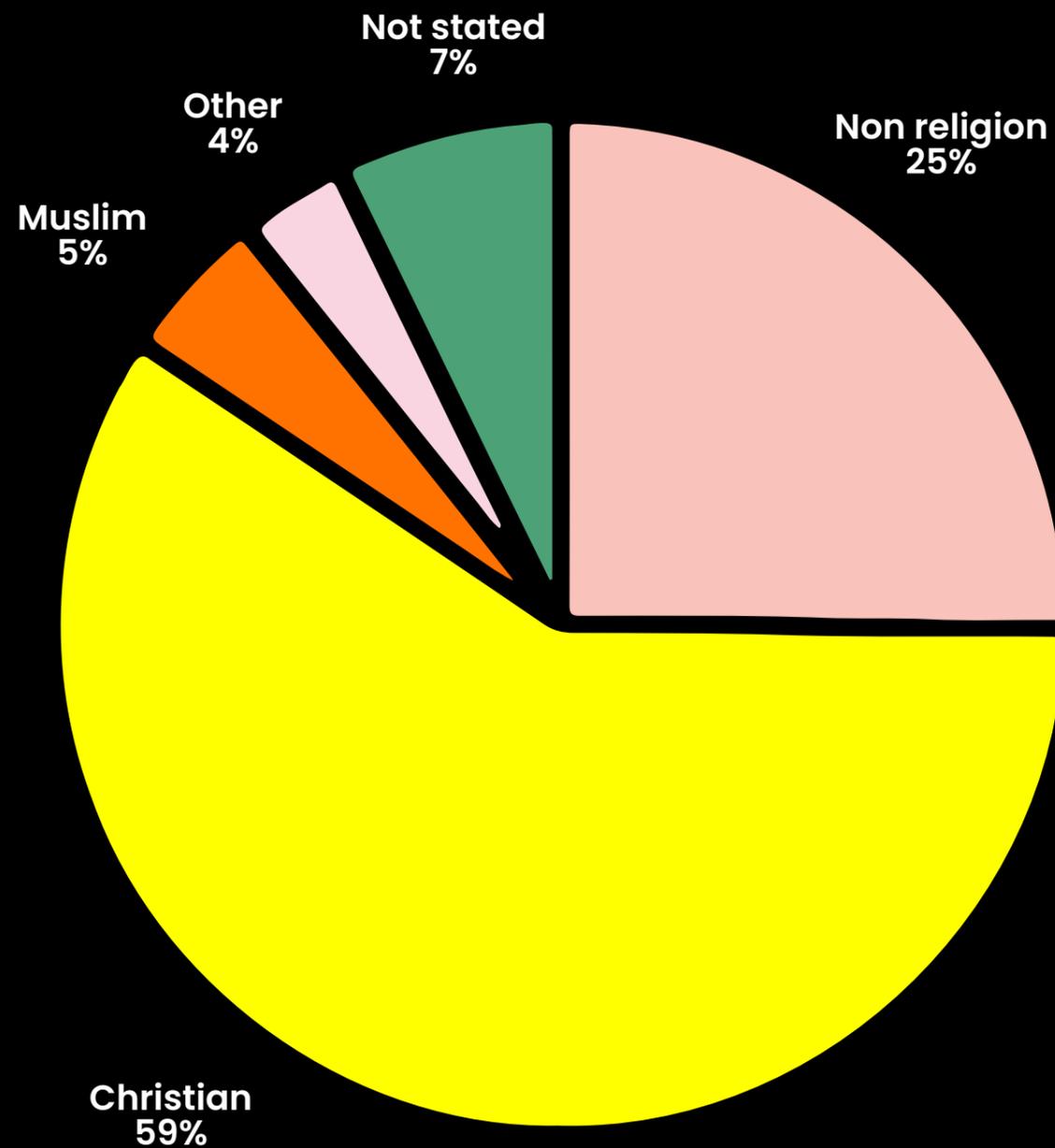
12%

say they believe in God with absolute certainty.



Total Religious affiliation, England and Wales, 2011

Source: Census - Office for National Statistics



Religions and Belief Landscape

In the 2011 census, 'Other' incorporates:

Religion	Count
Pagan	56,620
Spiritualist	39,061
Jain	20,288
Spiritual	13,832
Wicca	11,766
Ravidassia	11,058
Rastafarian	7,906
Baha'i	5,021
Druid	4,189
Taoist	4,144
Zoroastrian	4,105
Believe in God	2,969
Scientology	2,418
Pantheism	2,216
Heathen	1,958
Own Belief System	1,949
Satanism	1,893
Witchcraft	1,276
Deist	1,199
Shintoism	1,075

*Note: This list does not include two synthetic categories: 'mixed religion' (23,566) and 'other religions' (13,812), comprising miscellaneous responses not coded in some way.

In the 2011 census, 'No religion' incorporates:

Religion	Heading 1	Heading 2
Mysticism	158	204
Native American	234	127
New Age	906	698
Occult	99	502
Own Belief System	3,259	1,949
Pagan	30,569	56,620
Pantheism	1,603	2,216
Rastafarian	4,692	7,906
Satanism	1,525	1,893
Scientology	1,781	2,418
Spiritualist	32,404	39,061
Taoist	3,532	4,144
Theism	505	830
Universalist	971	923
Vodun	123	208
Wicca	7,227	11,766
Zoroastrian	3,738	4,105

British Social Attitudes Survey 2019

*** Two-thirds (66%) of people in Britain never attend religious services, apart from special occasions such as weddings, funerals and baptisms.**

*** The proportion that report they attend religious services less than monthly has decreased. The proportion that report they attend at least weekly, or less often but at least monthly, has remained stable – at around 11% and 7% respectively.**



An interesting question to ask, therefore, is what 'no religion' really means in contemporary Britain.

It is clear from the statistics above that it does not automatically mean atheism, or a total rejection of all religious belief systems and spiritual practices. Recent academic research from the University of Kent (under the auspices of the Understanding Unbelief programme*) has demonstrated that those who identify as 'non-religious' are a diverse group and may well still be involved in what we might see as spiritual activities, practices and views on the ethics of life and death. Notwithstanding this, the increase in those willing to identify as non-religious in Britain is a notable trend, and one to which we should pay close attention, as it is likely to continue.

*<https://research.kent.ac.uk/understandingunbelief/>)

Religions and Belief Landscape

It is important to be attuned to regional variations in the statistics on religious affiliation. In terms of Scotland and Northern Ireland, some similar patterns to England and Wales can be observed, as shown in the tables below:

Religion in Scotland	Number of People
Church of Scotland	1, 717, 871
Roman Catholic	841, 053
Other Christian	291, 275
Muslim	76,737
Buddhist	12,795
Jewish	5,887
No Religion	1,921,018

Religion in Scotland (2011, National Records of Scotland)

Religion in Northern Ireland	Number of People
Roman Catholic	738,083
Presbyterian	345,101
Church of Ireland	248,821
Methodist	54,253
No Religion	183,164

Religion in Northern Ireland (2011, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency)



The difference in religious affiliation across Local Authority areas may also be interesting for social work practice and planning. This can be gleaned from the Annual Population Survey 2018.*

This data is outlined in the following three tables. Although comparative data is available from every Local Authority area across England and Wales, in the tables only the top five areas are listed to give an indicative picture of the most populous religious and non-religious areas. It is perhaps not surprising to see areas such as Leeds or Birmingham in the top five of each table, given their population size, but it is interesting to note the variations across areas by religious tradition/non-religion.

*(<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/adhocs/009830religionbylocalauthoritygreatbritain2011to2018>).

Religions and Belief Landscape

Local Authority Area (England and Wales)	Number of People with No Religion
Leeds	343,871
Birmingham	341,889
Edinburgh	302,559
Glasgow	278,462
Cornwall	257,901

Largest number of people with no religion by LA Area (2018 Annual Population Survey)

Local Authority Area (England and Wales)	Number of Muslims
Birmingham	300,666
Newham (London)	148,363
Bradford	143,394
Tower Hamlets	123,656
Manchester	105,874

Largest number of Muslims by LA Area (2018 Annual Population Survey)

Local Authority Area (England and Wales)	Number of Christians (all denominations)
Birmingham	433,269
Leeds	350,831
Liverpool	320,055
Co. Durham	313,080
Glasgow	268,377

Largest number of Christians by LA Area (2018 Annual Population Survey)

Although across the British Isles there has been a notable overall decline in Christian affiliation and an increase in 'no religion' between the 2001 and 2011 census, it is important to look more carefully at these headlines and question whether this means that religion is declining in importance in our society.

As stated earlier, selecting 'no religion' on the census is likely to mean you are not affiliated with a Church (for example, the Church of England) but you may well hold some beliefs and partake in practices that some might see as religious or spiritual. Although there have been declines in Anglican affiliation, there have also been demographic increases in other Christian denominations in England and Wales, for example, Pentecostalism, which has been termed the 'fastest growing' religion in the world.* Other minority religions are also increasing – a pattern stemming from periods of post-war migration and the growing plurality of religious traditions in contemporary Britain. The growth of certain minority religions has also occurred because of religious conversion, particularly in the case of Buddhism.

*(<https://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/spirit-and-power/>).

Yet, despite these demographic changes, Christianity still remains a potent force in our social and political life. England has a combined Church and State, with the monarch at the head of both, and a number of Bishops taking seats in the House of Lords. There are other religio-state legal connections, too, for example the requirement for all state maintained schools to offer an act of daily collective worship (which must be 'broadly of a Christian character'*).

Therefore, despite some notable changes in the religious make-up of our societies in the UK over the past sixty years, religion (however you wish to define it) is still highly present.

*See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/281929/Collective_worship_in_schools.pdf

WHAT THE LAW REQUIRES [ENGLAND AND WALES]

What the Law Requires



The Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination in the provision of services and in employment on the grounds of religion or belief. In effect this applies to anyone who provides services and anyone who has or provides a job.

The Act defines religion or belief as “any religious belief, provided the religion has a clear structure or belief system...or a philosophical belief”.

Within that, a philosophical belief 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; and be worthy of respect in a democratic society, compatible with human dignity and not in conflict with the fundamental rights of others”.



This means that the definition of religion or belief is very broadly interpretable. It certainly means that employers and service providers must take the world's main religions seriously. But it also requires engagement with non-traditional religious beliefs (like paganism and pantheism), non-religious beliefs (like humanism and secularism), and non-religion (such as may be expressed in worldviews and values, such as environmentalism).

Some of this has been subject to legal actions intended to provoke debate about what counts as religion and belief, as in the case of the Jedi Knights* and the Pastafarians.**

***(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/commission-publishes-decision-on-jedi-registration-application>)**

****(<https://www.spaghettimonster.org/>)**

What the Law Requires

In these cases, the Charity Commission has adopted a more specific definition in practice, which has been used to decide the outcomes of high-profile legal questions as to whether certain groups (such as Scientologists) should be afforded the protections and benefits of being considered a 'religion' for charitable purposes. For example, when the Charity Commission rejected an application from The Temple of the Jedi Order in 2016, they did so on the basis that it did not 'promote moral or ethical improvement' in society, highlighting that this was considered to be key indicator of 'religion' in the contemporary British context.*

***(<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/commission-publishes-decision-on-jedi-registration-application>)**

Where an organisation has an ethos based on religion or belief, it may be able to apply an exemption in its employment practices from the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, on the grounds of a 'genuine occupational reason' (GOR). This means that it could demonstrate that commitment to a particular religion or belief is a requirement to carry out a particular job. Examples include being a Christian priest or a outreach worker working with Muslims. In social care this applies to hospital and prison chaplaincies, but for the rest of the social care workforce there are no obvious exceptions.



The 2010 Act also adds a new 'Public Sector Equality Duty' which requires that statutory social care services must have 'due regard' to three elements in employment and the provision of services:

What the Law Requires

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- To advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- To foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The Act explains that having 'due regard' involves:

- Removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
- Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
- Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.



As employers and service providers, social work and social care professionals should be aware that discrimination may be direct or indirect. Both are prohibited.

Direct discrimination is when someone is treated differently and not as well as other people because of their religion or belief. Direct discrimination or treating someone 'less favourably' can be due to:

- their religion or belief (direct discrimination)
- their perceived religion or belief (direct discrimination by perception) – e.g. a Sikh person who is discriminated against because they are perceived as Muslim
- their association with someone who has a particular religion or belief (direct discrimination by association).

What the Law Requires

Indirect discrimination can occur where a workplace rule, practice or procedure is applied to all workers, but disadvantages people who hold a particular religion or belief.

In some limited circumstances, indirect discrimination may be justified if it is necessary for the business to work. For example, an employer may not employ someone who insists on having certain times off for religious observance, when the time they want off is the employer's busiest time, and all staff are needed to ensure customers' orders are met.



Accommodating religious beliefs

Social work and social care employers are not legally obliged to give workers time off or facilities for religious observance, but they must try to accommodate them whenever possible. For example, if a worker needs a prayer room and there is a suitable room available then a worker should be allowed to use it, providing it does not disrupt others or affect their ability to carry out their work properly. Many employers find that being sensitive to the cultural and religious needs of their employees and service users makes good 'business' sense. This can include making provisions for:

- flexible working
- religious holidays and time off to observe festivals and ceremonies
- prayer rooms with appropriate hygiene facilities
- dietary requirements in staff canteens and restaurants
- dress requirements

What the Law Requires

Proportionality

Employers and providers of services are required to exercise 'proportionality' in their actions in relation to religion and belief. The principle of proportionality is at the heart of many human rights claims, as any restrictions must be a "proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim". Proportionality is often most clearly explained through the expression "don't use a sledgehammer to crack a nut". Social work and social care settings should consider the aim to be achieved, and whether or not it is a legitimate aim; then consider the means which are used to achieve that aim. Are they appropriate and necessary? When considering actions in relation to religion or belief, employers might ask:

- **Why should a person's request being accommodated or restricted?**
- **What is the problem being addressed by the accommodation or restriction?**
- **Will the accommodation or restriction lead to a reduction in the problem?**
- **Does the accommodation or restriction involve a blanket policy, or does it allow for different cases to be treated differently?**
- **Does a more accommodating or less restrictive alternative exist?**
- **Has sufficient regard been paid to the rights and interests of all those affected?**
- **Do safeguards exist against error or abuse?**

What the Law Requires

Summary

- **It is illegal to discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief in the provision of services or in employment.**
- **Exemptions apply where an organization can demonstrate that there is a 'genuine occupational requirement' (GOR).**
- **Discrimination may be direct (when someone is treated differently and not as well as other people because of their religion or belief) or indirect (where a workplace rule, practice or procedure is applied to all workers, but disadvantages people who hold a particular religion or belief). Social care settings should avoid both.**
- **All statutory public services are subject to a Public Sector Equality Duty, requiring them to take proactive steps to avoid discrimination and promote equality.**
- **Social work and social care settings should accommodate the religion and belief needs of employees and service users where they can and where it is proportionate to do so.**

RELIGION AND BELIEF LITERACY FRAMEWORK



Religion and Belief Literacy: 4 Key Questions for Social Work and Social Care Professionals

Category: What do I/does my organisation count as religion, belief and spirituality? What do we take seriously? What do we need to accommodate? What do we exclude, and why?

Disposition: What attitudes, including possible prejudices, inform the stance we take towards religion, belief and spirituality in our workplace? Do we see it as positive and enriching, or problematic and threatening? Do we think of ourselves as 'secular' and do we know what we mean by that? Neutral? Open? Something else? How could we develop a position on all this if we feel we need one?

Knowledge: What do we need to know here, now, in this setting, with this staff member/client/group? Where can I find out? Who can I ask? How should I ask?

Skills: What concrete skills are needed here, now, in this setting with this staff member/client/group?

The term 'Religion and Belief Literacy' can be traced back to L R Ward's 1953 article titled 'The Right to Religious Literacy', in the American journal Religious Education. There it was used to mean that "...the child... has a right...to know God, to know nature, to know the mind and its possibilities, and to know that the knowledge-life as well as the love-life of man has a kind of infinity" (Ward 1953, p380). This very belief-centred definition was followed by sociologist Vladimir de Lissovoy's 1954 article, A Sociological Approach to Religious Literacy. Taking a far more critical stance, in reflections on what ought to be included in an undergraduate introduction to sociology in his university in New York, he observed

"...it is important for the prospective teacher to understand, not only the structure and function of religious institutions found in most communities, but to have knowledge and understanding of the basic religious principles which are inherent in the major denominations" (de Lissovoy 1954, p419).

This reflected a view of religion as a series of traditions, key features of which could be learnt in a sort of A-Z.



This has since been superseded by a focus on religion and belief, which includes non-religious beliefs too. These are thought of as 'lived' and fluid, not fixed and traditional.

There were no further developments until Andrew Wright's Religious Education in the Secondary School: Prospects for Religious Literacy (1993) linked literacy with religion in the context of schools. At this time, literacy was coming to be seen in terms of narrative experiences and sets of social practices, rather than mere knowledge of rules and grammar. In this context, Wright framed his arguments for a new religious education in schools, aimed at promoting better religion and belief literacy. According to him, religion and belief literacy should be about gaining understanding through critical dialogue of how the self and others make meaning, whether through traditional religions or on a wider canvas of belief.

More recently, Stephen Prothero thought religion and belief literacy was about the recovery of a loss of knowledge about traditions (Prothero 2008). He believed it was an important response to a growing 'spiritual marketplace' which was being used politically to enforce a shared conservative brand of morality. He saw this blurring of Protestant beliefs as so embedded in public discourse that Americans must know something about Protestant beliefs and the Bible to equip them to participate in and challenge that discourse intelligently.

Others like Diane Moore (2006) wanted religion and belief literacy to provide us with resources for how to recognise, understand and analyse religious influences in contemporary life, as a basis for peace-building. She drew attention to ignorance of the distinction between devotional expression and non-sectarian study of religion; controversy about women and Islam; the multiplicity, as opposed to homogeneity, of traditions and beliefs; change over time; and the cultural specificity of religions which make the same traditions differ from place to place. She emphasised a necessity to perceive the connections between a complexly religious world and the social, political and cultural framework.

Another approach took this further, seeing religion and belief literacy as 'harmony'. Michael Barnes and Jonathan Smith insisted on a broadly multi-faith perspective (Barnes and Smith, 2016), saying that it was the very specificity of faith commitments that gave them life and that the task is not to elide them but to value their differences. This was about a deep engagement with religion as people live it.

Ford and Highton developed this, exploring the role of Theology and Religious Studies (Ford and Highton, 2016). For them, Theology and Religious Studies were not the same as religious literacy, but they might be used as tools to achieve it. Talk within and about a public realm is simply not possible without taking seriously the pervasive religion within it, regardless of one's own religion, beliefs, or lack thereof. They perceived useful 'argumentative structures' in all the religious traditions which could be used to enable dialogue. Engagement in what they called this 'conversational mode' would lead to religious literacy, they argued.

Across the field there is a shared sense that religion and belief literacy is important because too many have lost the ability to talk about religion and belief in the public sphere, putting everybody, religious and





non-religious, at a disadvantage because religion and belief are so central an aspect of many human lives. As has been argued elsewhere, “there is an urgent need to re-skill public professionals and citizens for the daily encounter with the full range of religious plurality” (Dinham, 2016 p. 110), across the widest of settings and sectors. One response is the Religion and Belief Literacy Framework which has emerged from a decade or so of work in this field (Dinham 2019).

The framework consists of a journey through four phases. The first phase is called ‘Categorisation’ and is concerned with the need to understand the conceptual landscape in which religion and belief are framed and what people think is meant by these terms. In particular, it is concerned with how individuals and communities themselves categorise or define religion and belief. In the 21st century, arguably this incorporates potential for stretching definitions of religion and belief to include consumerised, deformed or revived religious standpoints and a variety of non-religious beliefs, values and worldviews. The critical thing is that each person or organisation knows what they mean and can articulate this clearly. Categorisation is intended to encourage understandings of religion and belief as lived experiences

which self-evidently affect the way that people live their lives (Schilbrack 2010) rather than as historic perspectives or cultural artefacts (Boisvert, 2015).

The second phase of this framework is ‘Disposition’. This involves exploration of the often unconscious emotional, atavistic or prejudiced assumptions that people bring to discussions about religion and belief (Kanitz, 2005) and making these explicit. There may be significant gaps between what people feel, what they think, and what they know in relation to religion and belief, but these can readily be conflated. Being able to identify these assumptions and emotions is seen as a critical precursor for thoughtful engagement with diverse religions and beliefs. They often translate into an institutional ‘stance’ (Dinham and Jones, 2012) which adds a further layer to the context in which professionals and workplaces respond to religion and belief diversity when they encounter it.

‘Knowledge’ is the third phase of the Religion and Belief Literacy Framework. While some general knowledge of the religions and beliefs which are likely to be encountered may be important, equally valuable is having the capacity and openness to acquire further knowledge from credible sources when required. This

entails developing the confidence and experience to ask appropriate questions appropriately. It recognises that the lived experiences of people holding religious or non-religious beliefs are fluid and permeable and can vary considerably, so that religiously literate people are those who are able to understand religion and belief as changing and specific to the individual – as identity rather than tradition.

The final phase in the framework is 'Skills'. Having developed clarity about how religion and belief are understood in the social and conceptual landscape, being aware of one's assumptions and having some knowledge of some religion practices and beliefs all inform the skills required. There is a dearth of research underpinning the sorts of skills which are needed, given that these should be related to the challenges and needs at hand in any given sector or setting. The Religion and Belief Literacy Framework concludes that new research is required to plug the gaps – whether large-scale and formal or swift and informal. The scope and scale of the research will depend on the needs, timescales and resources available. Important work has already been undertaken around death and dying, in hospices for example (Pentaris, 2019), or

working with indigenous communities in Canada (Coates et al., 2007) and Australia (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010), though the extent to which this has entered their respective target fields of social work education and practice is debatable. The opportunities for identifying the religion and belief challenges in every setting are extensive, as are the possibilities for translating findings into skills through training and practice.

Overall, the Framework is intended to help users think through the implications and challenges of religions, beliefs and world-views in different situations and real-life contexts, starting with the understanding that religion and belief literacy resides in an improved quality of conversation about the category of religion and religious belief itself, which first of all removes all the muddled preconceptions and assumptions. The Framework then requires an exploration of disposition – the emotional feelings we each carry about religion and belief – and only then leads to a discovery of the knowledge and skills which are needed. The Framework sees religion and belief literacy as contingent and setting-specific. It is a stretchy, fluid concept that is variously configured and applied, and should be adapted as appropriate to the specific workplace environment.

SOME REAL- WORLD EXAMPLES AND DILEMMAS



Cases relating to 'visible manifestations' of religion and belief (e.g. things people wear)

Real-World Examples and Dilemmas

- A member of the check-in staff at British Airways (BA), Nadia Eweida, was a Coptic Christian. In 2004 a new uniform policy required female staff to wear an open-necked blouse and a cravat. In 2006 Eweida began wearing a cross openly to show her religious commitment. After initially agreeing to remove it, she later refused to do so and was sent home on unpaid leave, later rejecting an offer of an alternative administrative position on the same pay but without customer contact. She lodged a claim for direct and indirect discrimination and harassment in the same year, but all her claims were dismissed, first by the Employment Tribunal and the Employment Appeal Tribunal in January and April 2008, and then by the Court of Appeal in February 2010. Eweida appealed to the European Court of Human Rights which in January 2013 ruled under the Human Rights Act Article 9 that her right to manifest her belief had unjustifiably been breached. It stated that domestic courts had given too

much weight to the employer's need to project a corporate image and not enough to the employee's right to wear a visible cross, which did not adversely affect that corporate image. The UK government accepted the judgment. In the meantime, BA amended its uniform policy from February 2007 to allow staff to display a faith or charity symbol while wearing the uniform. Eweida returned to work, but BA did not compensate her for the earnings she had lost since the previous September.

- Shirley Chaplin was a member of the Free Church of England and a nurse with 30 years' experience. Throughout her working life she had worn a crucifix on a chain over her uniform as a manifestation of her religious beliefs. In June 2007, new uniforms were introduced at the Trust which for the first time included a V-neck tunic for nurses. In June 2009 Chaplin's manager asked her to remove her 'necklace', stating that it contravened the new uniform policy restricting the wearing of . Her employer offered several alternative solutions, for example, that she wear the crucifix under a high-necked T-shirt or pinned inside a pocket, but Chaplin rejected them all. Consequently, she was removed from her nursing duties and redeployed to a post that did not have the same uniform restrictions. This post ceased to exist in



July 2010. Supported by the Christian Legal Centre, Chaplin took her case to an Employment Tribunal which ruled that she had not been subjected to either direct or indirect religious discrimination. Chaplin's case went to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2011, where it was linked with the Eweida case. The ECtHR ruled against Chaplin in January 2013. The key difference between this case and Eweida's was that the Trust had imposed its restriction on health and safety grounds in order to reduce the risk of injury when handling patients, and that the policy applied equally to non-Christians and Christians because it related to jewelery, not the religious symbol itself.

Cases relating to workplace adjustments (referred to as 'accommodations')

- Jake Fugler, who was Jewish, was employed by a hair dressers in London. After four years there, Yom Kippur, the most important festival in Judaism when many secular as well as religious

Jews fast, refrain from work and attend a synagogue, fell on a Saturday. Fugler requested a day's holiday, but this was refused as his employer had discouraged holiday requests on Saturdays, the salon's busiest day, and several other staff had already booked the day off. After arguing with the salon owner, Fugler walked out. He lodged a claim for religious discrimination, as well as race discrimination and constructive unfair dismissal. In June 2005, an Employment Tribunal found that the employer's provision indirectly discriminated against Jews and was not justified since the employer had failed to consider whether its staffing needs could have been accommodated in some other way.

- In another case, a residential care worker who believed that Sunday was a day of rest, was issued a final warning for refusing work on occasional Sundays and resigned in May 2010. An Employment Tribunal found that her employer was not guilty of discrimination and was justified in requiring her to work on the occasional Sunday. The Employment Appeal Tribunal (EAT) supported this on the grounds that Sunday resting was not a core element of the Christian faith, though the Court of Appeal, which agreed, refrained from making any such comment.**

- In the case of Cherfi, a Muslim security guard claimed that the refusal of his employer to allow him time off to attend Friday prayers was discriminatory. This failed since the employer had offered alternative work rotas (involving weekend working in lieu of time off on Friday) that the applicant had declined.**

RELIGION AND BELIEF IN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE: ASSESSMENTS WITH SERVICE USERS



Assessments with Service Users

Social Work and Social Care Training, Benchmarks and Regulations

The majority of standards, benchmarks and ethical codes in the UK and internationally require that religion and belief are addressed in the social care professions, but barely any define the terms or set out what to do about them. There is a religion and belief literacy gap.

A study comparing the British Association of Social Workers (BASW) and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in the US shows that the US looks more favourably at the role and significance of religion and belief in their profession than their British counterparts (Furman et al 2005). Furman also cites a survey by Moss (2003) into the extent to which social work training programmes are preparing social workers to understand the role and impact of religion and belief in society in the UK. Among the thirty social

work training programmes willing to take part, 26% reported that their syllabus did not cover these issues at all, 46% reported that these issues were included very minimally (usually once in the entire programme) and then only in modules on diversity, and 36% included these issues only in training on death and dying or relating to older people (Furman et al 2005 p833). Many social work and social care professionals report feeling inadequately prepared to discuss religion and belief with service users (Horwath & Lees, 2010), or even knowing how to refer to religious celebrations in ways which will avoid their fear of offending people of varying religions (Bradstock, 2015).

Crucially the study found that none of the standards include any definition as to what is meant by terms such as 'religion', 'faith', 'belief' or 'spirituality'. Instead, they are used mostly interchangeably and most frequently mentioned as parts of long lists of factors which contribute to diversity within communities. The NISCC standards for social care workers (NISCC, 2015a, p. 32) and social workers (NISCC, 2015b, p. 38) goes furthest, providing a "Glossary" which defines "Equality" as "Treating everyone

fairly and ensuring they have access to the same opportunities irrespective of their race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief". But this still leaves practitioners ill-equipped to define or act on religion, belief or spirituality.

These issues are found internationally too in a study of guidance across a set of countries which have English in common as an official language and for whom a degree of shared histories and ideologies have resulted in many commonalities in respect of social work education (Crisp and Dinham 2019). This research explored the regulations or standards for social work education in Australia, Canada, Hong Kong, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, the UK and the United States as well as the Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession (IFSW and IASSW, 2004). Each document was searched electronically using the keywords 'Beliefs', 'Faith', 'Religion', 'Secular' and 'Spirituality'. One or more statements associated with religion and belief was found in documents from all jurisdictions except for Hong Kong (SWRB, 2015) and Wales (CCfW, 2013). But none defines the terms, or gives guidance on what to do in

practice. Religion is often one of several items in a list of factors which contribute to diversity within communities.

Considerations of religion, belief, faith and spirituality come to the fore at different stages in the social work journey, including in assessment, care planning and review, and, quite often, when decisions about safeguarding are being made. Merchant et al. (2008: 3) state that, in particular, 'initial assessment provides a key encounter point in which to place the value of the whole person at the centre of activity' and therefore is a crucial time to begin to understand the value of religion and/or spirituality in the lives of service users.

Alongside the religion and belief literacy framework we outlined above, there exist a number of other practical frameworks for social care practitioners in working with religion and belief that support the different types of assessment and planning tasks. Most notable of these include Furness and Gilligan's (2010) framework, and Hodge's (2001) 'narrative framework'. Although there are different practical tools that might be used to gather values, views and life-stories throughout the assessment

processes, as Furness and Gilligan (2010: 45) state, 'In most settings, it is perhaps unrealistic to expect practitioners to conduct separate assessments of issues arising from religion and belief' (p. 45), not least because of the pressures of time and resources. Furness and Gilligan's (2010) framework is based around a series of questions that practitioners can ask themselves before, during and after an assessment to judge whether religion, spirituality and belief have been adequately considered. This framework can be used with existing assessments within the Single Assessment Process or the Common Assessment Framework (p. 45).

In working with older people, for example, there are several places on the Single Assessment Process documentation where questions about religion or belief might arise, and which can also be reviewed at later stages. Social care practitioners are asked to collect demographic information about an individual's religious affiliation which might trigger a conversation, but beyond this, when asking about mental or physical wellbeing, or about culture and religion, there is an opportunity to raise bigger questions about an individual's

view of life and to use this to determine what might be important. Merchant et al. (2008) encourage asking ‘what helps you most when things are difficult, when times are hard?’ Although they are writing from the perspective of mental health care, a similar approach could be taken in other fields of social care practice. Answers to these kinds of questions could determine how an individual might cope under stress, who or what they draw on for support, what community connections (including with a place of worship) they might want to maintain in the event of illness or disability, and, in terms of care planning, which services that they might want to access. This might also work the other way around – for example, someone with a strongly atheist tendency might be very averse to attending a faith-based lunch club or residential provision. It is also important not to discount conversations about religion and belief if someone highlights that they are non-religious. They may well be open to discussing spirituality and faith practices but might not fit neatly into an institutional affiliation. This is likely to be increasingly the case in British society, if the number of those with ‘no religion’ continues to rise. When considering religion and belief in

assessment and care planning, there might be a tendency to think primarily about the practical issues for daily living, for example, relating to dietary restrictions and annual religious observances. Whilst taking these into account is of vital importance according to the law, it is also important to leave space for ‘the bigger questions’ of what gives life meaning. This can be difficult when time is limited in certain assessment situations (for example, in hospital, or if someone is extremely distressed) and also if social care practitioners are not prepared for the kinds of answers that might be given, or the kinds of requests people might make following on from discussions of this nature. However, providing sufficient space to air views on religion, belief, faith and spirituality might help you to understand your service user’s needs, attitudes and perspectives with more clarity.



In assessment and care planning with due regard to religion and belief, what is important is to move beyond simply accepting that people hold faith positions (and recording it as demographic information about them) to a more careful investigation of the role of religion in the lives of individuals and within communities.

Knitter (2010: 260) draws a clear distinction between 'respecting' people's religious affiliations and 'engaging' with them properly, which for him, means that practitioners 'have to enter into these commitments and appreciate their power and their coherence'. This kind of approach has also been emphasized by Furness and Gilligan, and within Crisp (2017).

Assessments with Service Users

A number of scholars and social care practitioners have noted that religion might not always be a force for positive change in the lives of service users. Although religious practices might bring comfort to people in distress, and religious communities might be a support, they also might not. There have been well-documented cases where people diagnosed with mental health conditions might be encouraged to pray rather than accept psychiatric support, and where religiously oriented delusions might cause significant distress (see also, Furness and Gilligan, 2010, and Merchant et al, 2008: 7).

The Furness and Gilligan Framework (2010)



We suggest that, in undertaking assessments, interventions and evaluations, practitioners need to reflect explicitly on the following eight questions:

1. Are you sufficiently spiritually aware and reflexive about your own religious and spiritual beliefs or the absence of them and your responses to others?
2. Are you giving the individuals/groups involved sufficient opportunities to discuss their religious and spiritual beliefs and the strengths, difficulties and needs that arise from them?
3. Are you listening to what they say about their beliefs and the strengths, difficulties and needs that arise from them?
4. Do you recognise individuals' expertise about their own beliefs and the strengths and needs that arise from them?

Assessments with Service Users

5. Are you approaching this piece of practice with sufficient openness and willingness to review and revise your plans and assumptions?
6. Are you building a relationship that is characterised by trust, respect, and a willingness to facilitate?
7. Are you being creative in your responses to individuals' beliefs and the strengths and needs that arise from them?
8. Have you sought out relevant information and advice regarding any religious and spiritual beliefs and practices that were previously unfamiliar to you?



(Furness and Gilligan, 2010: 47–48).



Key messages summary:

- **Social care practitioners have a responsibility to give attention to religion, belief and spirituality in their practice. However, not every social worker feels comfortable or equipped to do this well.**
- **There is a legal duty on social workers and social care organisations to give due regard to religion and belief (and this is enshrined in the Equalities Act 2010), including for their own employees.**
- **The religion and belief landscape in contemporary Britain is highly diverse and plural. Drawing on a range of statistical data, one can identify certain trends – a decline in Anglican and Catholic Christianity, an increase in Pentecostal Christianity and minority religions (such as Islam or Buddhism), and a large increase in the ‘non-religious’. Non-religion, however, does not always equate to atheism.**

Assessments with Service Users

- **In the Religion and Belief Literacy Framework (Dinham 2019), there are four phases that social care staff can use to think through the implications and challenges of religion and belief:**
 - 1. categorisation (the need to understand the religion and belief landscape)**
 - 2. disposition (space to explore the assumptions we bring to the conversation about religion and belief)**
 - 3. knowledge (learning about the context and asking appropriate questions)**
 - 4. skills (context specific application of developed knowledge)**
- **Consideration of religion and belief arise often at the assessment and care planning stage. It is important to consider the implications of religion and belief on practical tasks of daily living, but also around the bigger questions of the lives that people want to lead and what gives life meaning.**