

Project Summary

- 1 The project on “Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales: Theory, Policy and Practice (2000-2010)” will establish a contemporary benchmark in scholarly studies on "discrimination" and "equality" with regard to "religion" and "belief". It is vitally important for the future of religion and society to understand the nature and extent of such discrimination and the adequacy of equality policies, practices and laws designed to tackle it.
- 2 The project seeks to inform public debate in this contentious area and equip users of research in public, private and voluntary and community sector organisations (including among policy makers, and in religion and belief groups) to make a difference by developing understanding, policy and practice in a more evidence-based way.
- 3 Because the issues involved are complex and multi-faceted, to achieve a rounded, balanced and comprehensive understanding requires collaborative multi and inter-disciplinary humanities and social science research. Therefore the research team includes scholars from the fields of Theology and Religious Studies (Paul Weller), Sociology (Kingsley Purdam) and Human Rights Law (Nazila Ghanea). It combines expertise in religion, research methods and human rights law and builds on the results of the first (1999-2001) government-commissioned study of Religious Discrimination in England and Wales which Paul Weller directed and in which Kingsley Purdam was the Research Officer. That project was based on a national survey and four in-depth area case studies.
- 4 That project's final report (see Weller, Feldman and Purdam, et al, 2001, *Religious Discrimination in England and Wales*, Home Office Research Study 220, Research, Development, Statistics, The Home Office, London, at: <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hors220.pdf>) found evidence of unfair treatment especially in education, employment and media, particularly as reported by Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. There was some overlap between religious and racial discrimination, while Pagans and members of New Religious Movements also reported considerable hostility.
- 5 Organisations that participated in that first national survey will be re-contacted in a new survey, in which the same but also new questions will be asked. In addition the original case study areas (Newham, Cardiff, Blackburn, Leicester) will be revisited and qualitative research conducted. An additional location (Norwich) will take account of possibly distinct results from an area with a strongly rural hinterland and will capture potential developments linked with recent EU labour migration. Focus groups will help to capture the perspective of those who understand themselves as "non-religious".

- 6 Findings from the original study will be compared with current findings to inform conclusions about how far patterns in reported religious discrimination (type; frequency; seriousness; groups affected; areas of social life) might have changed.
- 7 The new research also goes beyond the limitations of the original project, examining how religion and belief data from the 2001 Census has been associated with other data (eg. on ethnicity, educational qualifications and employment), while more directly relevant survey data (eg the Home Office Citizenship Survey) also now exists.
- 8 A thorough review and analysis of the use made of this data will be undertaken along with reviews of relevant literature and case law. This will be explored in the context of a decade in which the concept of religious discrimination has become more accepted and incorporated into policy, practice and law (eg. *Employment Equality [Religion or Belief] Regulations, 2003*) but also more integrated into a wider equality and human rights framework with the *Equality Act, 2006* and the 2008 establishment of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and plans for more integrated equalities law. At the same time there has been:
 - a balancing of the previous emphasis on "religion" by reference also to "belief"
 - a growing emphasis on "social cohesion", "shared values" and "Britishness"
 - the emergence of tensions with other "equalities" strands
 - the "social policy shock" of the 7/7 London Transport bombings
 - the impact of the bombings on discourses, policies and practices identified with "multiculturalism"
 - the emergence of "preventing violent extremism" initiatives to counter the threat of religiously-justified terror.
- 9 The project will result in a scholarly monograph; bibliography; summary report for all participants; briefing report for opinion-formers and policy-makers in the public, private and voluntary sectors; knowledge exchange seminars for practitioners in these sectors, and for religious groups and legal practitioners.