

Project team

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Project updates and team appointments

Updated project staffing details will be found on the project website at <http://www.derby.ac.uk/religion-and-society>



Project studentship

Christianity remains the largest religion in England and Wales while Churches and Christian organisations play a substantial role as employers and/or as providers of a variety of services to the public, especially in education and social care. In the course of their work in these fields, groups which themselves can appeal to equalities and human rights with regard to religion need to take into account other equality and human rights laws and policies (eg on gender and sexual orientation). This can give rise to tensions and conflicts. The doctoral studentship linked with the project has the working title of "Religious Freedom and Sexual Orientation: Compatibility, Contestation and Convergence: The Case of Church-Related Adoption Agencies".

Knowledge exchange seminars

A briefing report geared to opinion-formers and policy-makers in the public, private and voluntary/community sectors will be produced to inform five knowledge exchange seminars to be held in Autumn 2012, at the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby. These are for practitioners in the public, private and voluntary/community sectors; religious groups; and legal practitioners. Seminar discussion of the issues will inform other project outcomes.

Timetable and outcomes

In 2010, the project will focus on the national survey; in 2011 on the fieldwork; and in 2012 on the knowledge exchange seminars and other project outcomes. These will include a scholarly monograph study of religion and belief, discrimination and equality in England and Wales over the past decade; an annotated bibliography on religion, belief, discrimination and human rights; a doctoral thesis; and a summary paper for all project participants.

Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales



Theory, Policy and Practice (2000-2010)

A 2010-2012 project (AH/H016074/1) in the Religion and Society research programme supported by



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Project context and aims

It is vitally important for the future of religion and society to understand the nature and extent of discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief and the adequacy of equality policies, practices and laws designed to tackle it.

This project will establish a benchmark in scholarly studies on 'discrimination' and 'equality' in relation to 'religion' and 'belief'. It will inform public debate in this contentious area and equip users of research to develop policy and practice in a more evidence-based way.

The project will build on the methods and results of the first government-commissioned study of Religious Discrimination in England and Wales, 1999-2001¹.

That study found evidence of unfair treatment especially in education, employment and media, particularly as reported by Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. Some overlap was found between religious and racial discrimination. New Religious Movements also reported considerable hostility.

Ten years later, this new project will consider the impact of legal and policy developments on religion and human rights in which the category of 'religious discrimination' has become more widely accepted, while modified by reference to 'belief' and an emerging policy focus on 'shared values', 'social cohesion' and 'Britishness'.

The project will also take account of the 'social policy shock' of the 7/7 London bombings and their impact on the discourses, policies and practices of 'multiculturalism', including the emergence of 'preventing violent extremism' initiatives to counter the threat of religiously-justified terror.

¹ See P. Weller, A. Feldman and K. Purdam, et al, *Religious Discrimination in England and Wales*. Home Office Research Study 220, London, 2001, at <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/hors220.pdf>

Project questions

The 1999-2001 project's terms of reference were set by the Home Office. They were to:

- assess the evidence of religious discrimination in England and Wales, both actual and perceived
- describe the patterns shown by this evidence, including the:
 - overall scale
 - main victims
 - main perpetrators
 - main ways in which the discrimination manifests
- Indicate the extent to which religious discrimination overlaps with racial discrimination
- Identify the broad range of policy options for dealing with religious discrimination.

These questions will be asked again in this project in order to contribute to our understanding of change over the past decade. However, in the light of religious, social and legal developments since 1999-2001, the new project will also ask:

- How far might patterns in the reported experience of unfair treatment on the basis of religion (type of unfair treatment; frequency and seriousness; groups primarily affected; sectors of social life) have changed since the original project?
- What are the implications of the above for theory, law, policy and practice relating to issues of discrimination and for equality measures concerned with religion and belief, especially bearing in mind the changed context over the decade since the original project?
- How much awareness and use has there been of relevant legal provisions, including religious exemptions to other equalities laws? What have their effects been, including for those who do not see themselves as religious?

Project methods

This new project will undertake a thorough review of relevant case law and literature. It will analyse how data on religion and belief from the 2001 Census has been used in association with other data (eg on ethnicity, educational qualifications and employment). It will also examine more directly relevant survey data.

Organisations that participated in the 1999-2001 project's national survey will be invited to participate in a new one. In this many of the same questions, but also new ones, will be asked. Interview based field research will be conducted in the original case study areas of Newham, Cardiff, Blackburn and Leicester. Norwich is added as a location with a rural hinterland and developments linked to EU labour migration.

The original project's emphasis on 'religion' has been balanced by reference to 'belief'. This project will use focus groups to help capture the experiences and perspectives of those who do not see themselves as religious.

Project partnership

The Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby (<http://www.multifaithcentre.org>) is a charitable Trust with faith community, University and elected Trustees.

It will jointly host the knowledge exchange seminars that conclude the project. It is a partner organisation in a European Gold Prize winning Grundtvig project to develop Religious Diversity and Anti-Discrimination training and an associated community of practice called Belieforama.

Findings from this project will inform further development of that training, information about which will be made available to project participants to support and inform their practical engagement with project issues and findings.