Discrimination on the grounds of Religion or Belief

A NATFHE Discussion Document
The University & College Lecturers’ Union is the largest trade union and professional association for lecturers, trainers, researchers and managers working in further and higher education throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Of our 67,000 members 43,000 are employed in further, adult, land-based and prison education whilst 19,000 work in universities (mainly the post-92 universities) and colleges of higher education. Our membership also includes educators in the private sector and students training to teach in further and higher education.

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# Discrimination on the Grounds of Religion or Belief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECTION</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Legislation – Past, Present &amp; Future</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The needs of Religious Minorities in the Workplace</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Employment Rights</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Old Legislation</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Religion and Education</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 The Right to have no Religion</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Squaring the Circle</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Conclusion</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Policy on Culture, Religion and Belief</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short Introductions to the Major Religions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

Why do we need a document on Religion and Belief at this time?

In the first place, we are moving rapidly to a position where discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief will be illegal, at least in employment.

Arguably, with the coming into force of the Human Rights Act on 2 October 2000, it already is, as Article 9 is concerned with rights in this area (see section 1).

A European Employment Framework Directive requires all member states to introduce domestic legislation outlawing discrimination at work on the grounds of religion or belief by December 2003. Colleges and universities will have to comply with this legislation, along with all other employers, and NATFHE needs to be ready to negotiate on this issue.

In Great Britain, white society in the twentieth century became increasingly secular, and thought of religious discrimination, when it thought of it at all, as a side effect of racial discrimination, arising out of it and always connected to it. (The picture always looked very different viewed from a Northern Ireland perspective). Hence, there were attempts to deal with the issue under The Race Relations Act, leading to the absurd outcome where Sikhs and Jews are regarded as ethnic groups under the Act, but Hindus and Muslims are not.

What the secular view failed to understand was that in contemporary Britain, ‘it is clear that, whether welcomed or not, religion has increasingly been emerging as a significant factor in personal and social identities, particularly within the minority communities.’ 1 It is becoming increasingly clear that in Great Britain, although the issues of race and religion overlap in many ways, they are not the same. In Northern Ireland, which is the only part of the United Kingdom to currently have anti-discrimination legislation on religion, they have never been regarded as the same.

The problem with dealing with religious discrimination under the Race Relations Act is that, for many members of minority communities, it does not address their self-understanding. Many individuals locate their sense of identity primarily in their religious adherence, rather than their racial origin. Muslims in particular have argued ‘that policies based on racial or ethnic frames of reference are not adequate to their self-understanding or basis of organisation.’ 2

What is the overall picture of religious adherence in the British Isles? The 2001 census for the first time contained a question on religion for England and Wales (but very strangely, not for Scotland). Until the results of that are published, figures for adherents of various religions are guestimates, based on surveys, questionnaires etc.

2 The Derby Research Project (as in 1)
In Great Britain (i.e. England, Scotland, Wales)
- 91% identify with a religion
- 37.25 million are nominally Christian, of whom 26 million are Anglican (Church of England, Episcopal Church of Scotland and Church of Wales), 5.7 million Roman Catholic and 5.5 million other denominations.
- There are estimated to be between 1.2 and 1.5 million Muslims, 0.5 million Sikhs and Hindus and 300,000 Jews.³
- There are a number of other small religious groups e.g. Rastafarians.

Although apparently only 9% of the population openly identifies itself as atheist, agnostic or humanist, it is widely believed and accepted (even by religious leaders!) that Britain is an overwhelmingly secular society, with the vast majority of the ‘Christian’ millions having only the most sporadic and superficial connection with their church. While the same may be true for some adherents of minority faiths, there is a much greater percentage of adherents of faiths other than Christianity for whom their sense of cultural identity is inextricably bound up with their religious beliefs and practices.

It is perhaps this gap between nominal adherence and passionate involvement which has caused the ‘Christian’ majority in the British Isles to take so long to understand the importance of religious discrimination. It is also this gap which means that the many schools which have a historical link with the Church of England (the whole education system in the United Kingdom was initially based on Christian denominational schools) are a very different kind of institution from the new ‘faith schools’ that are coming into being, with the encouragement of the Government (see section 5).

The summer and autumn of 2001 saw events which have made it very clear that we can no longer afford this gap in knowledge and understanding. Nationally, riots in Bradford which clearly had a religious component, occurred at the same time as children in Belfast were being impeded from attending Holy Cross Catholic Primary School. The events of 11 September 2001 and the response of the USA and its allies have led to a potentially very dangerous international situation. Some responses in this country and elsewhere have shown the potential of these events to increase the existence of Islamaphobia. Talk of a crusade or a jihad means that at the start of the 21st century, religion is the flashpoint in international relations. The very continued existence of humanity may depend on a growth in knowledge, understanding and tolerance of different expressions of religion and belief.

³ The Parekh Report 'The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain'
In Northern Ireland, the Fair Employment (Northern Ireland) Acts 1976 and 1989 prohibited discrimination on the grounds of religion in employment. These Acts have now been replaced with the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.

In Great Britain, unlike many European countries, there was no legislation protecting against religious discrimination until the coming into force of the Human Rights Act 1998, in October 2000. Prior to this, attempts had been made to use the Race Relations Act 1976 to cover religious discrimination, but this only resulted, on the basis of case law, in Jews and Sikhs being regarded as ethnic groups under the Act, whereas Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims are not. There is sometimes an overlap between racial and religious discrimination, but not always. The Race Relations Act can only be invoked where such an overlap occurs. It is clearly an entirely inadequate instrument for dealing with the whole field of religious discrimination.

Article 9 of the Human Rights Act gives important new rights in this area. It states:

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

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

It is important to be clear about what Article 9 does and doesn’t do.

- Cases under the Human Rights Act can only be taken against ‘public authorities’.
- It provides an absolute right to hold religious opinions and other beliefs.
- It provides a qualified individual right to manifest religion or belief.
- It provides a qualified collective right to manifest religion or belief.
- It does not define religion, and it covers freedom of thought and conscience as well as religion.
- It is not an equal treatment Article i.e. it does not lay down that members of all religions or none must be treated equally. Article 14 deals with non-discrimination, but that is not freestanding, and would have to be combined with Article 9 to have any effect in this area. Protocol 12 would make Article 14 free-standing, but so far the British Government has refused to sign up to Protocol 12.

Therefore, although the Human Rights Act is a big step forwards in terms of protecting freedom of belief, it by no means deals with all the issues.

For trade unionists, the European Employment Framework Directive may prove a more important piece of legislation. This requires all member states to outlaw discrimination at work on the grounds of
religion and belief (and also on the grounds of sexual orientation) by December 2003. (It also requires such legislation on the grounds of age and disability by 2006). The Government is currently working on the form such legislation will take. It is clear however, that it will not be blanket anti-discrimination legislation. In the first place, it will only apply to employment, and not to other areas of life. (It is likely that in due course the legislation will be extended, but that is some way off). It is also likely to include opt-outs. The Directive refers to ‘a genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement’ and permits organisations ‘the ethos of which is based on religion or belief’ to exercise ‘a difference of treatment based on a person’s religion or belief’. It also gives organisations ‘the ethos of which is based on religion or belief’ the right ‘to require individuals working for them to act in good faith and with loyalty to the organisation’s ethos’.

Put simply, this probably means that church schools will still be able to give preference to candidates for teaching posts who share the faith of the school. (Given the breadth of the concept of belief in The Human Rights Act, it probably would also give NATFHE, for example, a justification for making ‘A belief in Trade Unionism’ a job requirement!).

Because of the ‘genuine, legitimate and justified occupational requirement’ (i.e. an ‘essential nature’ defence), church schools would be unlikely to be able to defend requiring their cook or caretaker to share their faith.

Much of the thinking in the Directive on this issue is based on the Northern Ireland experience, which uses the ‘essential nature’ concept. However, schools are excluded from the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) order, and therefore school teachers cannot complain on the grounds of religious discrimination. It seems unlikely that such a blanket exemption can survive long-term, because it is incompatible with Article 9.2 of the Human Rights Act, but the Directive currently gives an opt-out to the recruitment of teachers in schools in Northern Ireland. NATFHE in Northern Ireland argues that schools should be included under the Order, as colleges, and training organisations already are. In Great Britain the code enabling religious schools to give preference to teachers sharing their faith and to take into account conduct incompatible with their beliefs in dismissal decisions is likely to survive in some form.

It should be clear that the most problematic part of any legislation will be how far, if at all, an organisation ‘the ethos of which is based on religion or belief’ will be allowed to discriminate in employment terms against those whose life-style does not conform with its beliefs. The most obvious area of conflict will be with the rights of lesbians and gay men, who will get employment protection at precisely the same time as the religious discrimination legislation comes into force. But there may also be conflicts over organisations requiring certain forms of dress, or making pregnancy outside marriage or the consumption of alcohol at any time, or having an abortion, a disciplinary offence.

However carefully the legislation is framed, there will no doubt be a considerable number of test cases before the balance between conflicting rights is established.

One further important development is The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the text of which has been agreed by the member states. This does not form part of European Law, and has been dismissed as irrelevant by the British Government. But it is likely that it will provide the basis for
the scrutiny of all European legislation. **Article 21** of this Charter is important because it establishes a freestanding principle of non-discrimination, and embodies most of Protocol 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights. **Article 22** relates to the right to respect of cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. It is likely that this Charter will have a growing impact across Europe.

The events of 11 September 2001 and their aftermath will greatly affect developments in this area. Part of the aftermath is that the British Government is introducing emergency legislation to extend the Race Relations Act to cover ‘incitement to religious hatred’. (It already covers ‘incitement to racial hatred’). This proposal is extremely controversial, as some see it as an assault on free speech, which could be extended to comic routines, analyses attacking religion as irrational, divisive etc. NATFHE’s HE members, who have ‘academic freedom’ built into their contract of employment, will certainly want to reserve the right to debate religious views and to express humanist or atheist views without falling foul of such a law. Hopefully, the legislation will be used in a positive way, seeking only to control those who publicly abuse, either verbally or physically, those practising their faith.

Finally, in this overview of the current legal position, Britain will have to deal with the fact that it still has old laws on its statute books which are clearly discriminatory in terms of religion. Education is the biggest area of concern, and will be dealt with separately. But there are a number of other areas which will need to be addressed. e.g.

- The restriction of a few offices to members of the Church of England
- The reserved seats for Anglican bishops in the House of Lords
- The right to refuse to work on Sunday given in the Sunday Trading Act 1994
- The fact that the blasphemy laws only apply to Christianity
- The absence of any right for members of minority religions to take holy days as holidays, whereas the main Christian holy days are public holidays.

It is clear that a great shake-up is coming.

## 2 The Needs of Religious Minorities in the Workplace

The most common irritant for members of minority faiths in the workplace is that the specific needs they have in order to fully practise their religion are largely ignored. British society has historically been based around Christian norms. Thus, all the major events in the Christian calendar are public holidays. Sunday, the Christian holy day, is a non-working day for most workers, there are no prayer times built into the working day because Christianity does not require them, most canteens will still serve fish on Fridays (although how many people will know why?) etc.

Practising members of faiths other than Christianity have a number of requirements that will need to be met if a college or university is not to find itself open to a charge of religious discrimination. The main ones are as follows:

a) Various religions require certain forms of dress of their adherents (e.g. turbans for Sikh men, skull-caps for Jewish men, trousers or ankle length dresses for Muslim women etc). Orthodox adherents will want to observe these rules, and the existence of dress codes may make this problematic at work.
Indeed, it is likely that laws on Religious Discrimination, combined with the right to freedom of expression in the Human Rights Act, are likely to make rigid dress codes a thing of the past.

b) Religious Observance. The standard working day and week make no allowance for the demands for observance of religions other than Christianity. The most obvious need is for Muslims to be provided with ablution and prayer facilities, and time for prayer at midday and afternoon, and specifically extended time at midday on Friday. But there is also the need for Jews, for example, not to be required to work between sunset on Friday and sunset on Saturday. While timetabling may present colleges and universities with some problems, they should be moving towards accommodating these needs.

In the interests of equality, the number of hours worked overall in the week should remain the same for all staff. When those hours are worked has always been very flexible in colleges and universities.

c) Religious Festivals. The main Christian holy days either fall on a Sunday or are public holidays. Adherents of other faiths should have the right to take three days of their annual leave on the days of most religious significance to them. To maintain equality, workers of no religion should also be able to specify three days of most significance to them.

d) Extended Leave. Muslims are required to go on pilgrimage at least once in their lifetime if possible. Particular religious/cultural requirements may lead to a need for lengthy visits abroad for births, weddings, funerals. Again, the number of paid annual leave days should remain the same for all staff, but requests for unpaid extended leave for such reasons should be treated sympathetically.

e) Food Requirements. Canteens in colleges and universities should be meeting the diverse dietary requirements of the major religions, for the benefit of both staff and students.

Although NATFHE’s legitimate concern is the rights of staff, colleges and universities will have to ensure that they do not discriminate against staff or students. Institutions may be more ready to meet prayer and food requirements for example, when they realise this will meet the needs of students as well. They should be building awareness of religious festivals and fast periods into planning internal examinations, assessment dates etc.

The centre pages consists of a Model Policy on Culture, Religion or Belief. NATFHE branches should be trying to negotiate something close to this with the management of institutions, in good time for the legislation coming into force in 2003.
3 Employment Rights

The new legislation is bound to make it illegal to discriminate against employees on the ground of their religion or belief. (Though there may be complications in relation to ‘faith’ educational establishments – see sections 1 and 5). This means that all institutions will need to ensure that their policies and procedures do not directly or indirectly discriminate against members of any religion or against those of no religion. This could get quite complex e.g. a contract which had a requirement to work Saturdays could be construed as indirectly discriminatory against Jews; a policy on dress codes which required all women staff to wear a regulation knee-length skirt could be construed as indirectly discriminatory against Muslims.

More positively, all the standard employment procedures should be revisited to see that their equality clauses make reference to religion. This includes recruitment and selection, promotion, dismissal (including redundancy), appraisal, discipline, grievance etc. Whether the new legislation will require monitoring on grounds of religion or belief remains to be seen, but we seem to be moving inexorably in the direction of monitoring the workforce as a move towards equality in employment, so it is likely that it will be introduced, if not sooner, then later (in Northern Ireland, monitoring the workforce is a central part of the Fair Employment legislation).

Once the outcome of the 2001 census is known, it should be possible to judge whether any religious groups are disproportionately unemployed, or in low status jobs in any particular region, and to move to positive action to rectify any anomalies.

4 Old Legislation

The European legislation is likely to mean that the United Kingdom will have to look at some of the old laws that still remain on the statute book that are discriminatory.

These arose in a period when overall Britain was a much more religious society than it is now, and many will see such laws as an anachronism in an essentially secular society. The most obvious ones are those that give the Church of England a privileged position as the ‘established’ church. They include laws that only a member of the Church of England can inherit the crown, or fill certain high offices of state. Many Church of England bishops have automatic entry to the House of Lords by virtue of their position. This may well be an opportunity to further reform the make-up of the Second Chamber, where it may well be appropriate to have representatives of a variety of religious groupings, but certainly not of just one. The Government’s current proposal is to reduce the number of Bishop’s seats in the House of Lords to 16, which reduces but does not solve the problem.

More controversial will be the blasphemy laws. Clearly it is discriminatory that these laws only relate to Christianity. No doubt there will be members of other religions who will want to see the blasphemy laws extended. Another solution, and one which would probably more reflect the predominantly secular tone of our society, would be to abolish them altogether, seeing them as a throwback to an earlier age.
The laws that are of most concern to NATFHE however, and indeed which have by far the biggest impact on society in general, are those which connect religion and education.

5 Religion and Education

It will be extremely difficult to remove religious discrimination from the educational process in the British Isles, for the simple reason that historically, education in these islands is inextricably intertwined with Christianity.

Before the 1870 Education Act, the vast majority of educational provision that existed was provided by church schools, some Roman Catholic, some non-Conformist, the majority Anglican. Even when, in 1870, the Government decided it had a responsibility to provide elementary education for all, it was happy to allow the continuation of church schools in areas where they already existed. Even today ‘voluntary’ schools (ones with greater or lesser amounts of church control and funding) account for about a third of primary schools and a fifth of secondary schools in England. The majority of voluntary primary schools are Anglican, while just over half of the voluntary secondary schools are Roman Catholic. Voluntary schools in Wales account for about 15% of all schools (primary and secondary) – 10% Anglican and 5% Roman Catholic. In Northern Ireland, the vast majority of schools are either ‘controlled’ (with a predominantly Protestant intake) or ‘maintained’ (with a predominantly Catholic intake). There is however a growing integrated schools sector, which has received additional funding from Government to encourage integration.

No state-funded further education colleges have a religious foundation, but many sixth form colleges do, and mergers between such colleges and FE colleges would be likely to bring religious representation on to corporations. Many of the colleges of higher education which were formerly teacher training colleges (staffed by NATFHE members) are church foundations. In October 2001, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education became the first specifically Christian institution in modern times to be granted university status. It is now the University of Gloucestershire.

It is against this background that the history of religious education as part of the curriculum must be viewed. Until the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1988, Religious Education was the only subject which it was compulsory to teach in schools. It is still compulsory, together with daily religious worship which would normally be ‘broadly Christian’ in character. Clearly, this latter provision will have to be changed to avoid claims of religious discrimination. The syllabus for Religious Education in schools (currently decided by LEAs) will need to be carefully considered to ensure that it provides an even-handed approach. It may be that ensuring that the curriculum for teacher trainees includes building respect and tolerance for a range of religions and beliefs, and transferring that respect and tolerance into the school curriculum, is one of the major building blocks in reducing intolerance and misunderstanding.

In 2001, we stand at a crossroads in the development of the inter-relationship between education and religion. Unlike many European countries and the USA, the UK never took the step of requiring state-funded education to be secular. The number of schools with a Christian foundation has hardly decreased. 5

5 Britain’s 24,000 state schools include 4,716 Church of England schools, 2,110 Roman Catholic schools, 27 Methodist schools, 32 Jewish schools, 4 Muslim schools, 2 Sikh schools and 1 Seventh Day Adventist School.
On being re-elected in May 2001, the Labour Government immediately made clear its intention to create more specialist schools, including what it called ‘faith’ schools. It was clearly encouraging members of religions other than Christianity to bid to have ‘faith schools’ established. It issued a consultation paper *Schools Achieving Success* which asked for responses on this question, amongst many others. On the basis of this, the Church of England is bidding for another 100 secondary schools.

Events of recent months have made this issue enormously controversial. In the wake of riots in Bradford, the Ousley report laid much of the blame for tensions in the city on the existence of many schools which are virtually segregated along ethnic and religious lines. Many of those concerned to bring peace to Northern Ireland have long held the view that the chances of long-term harmony will be greatly improved when schools stop being segregated along religious lines. The sight of Catholic children being abused on the way to their school in a mainly Protestant area has brought home to a much wider public how damaging such segregation can be. Finally, the events following on from 11 September have made clear how easily religious adherence can become a target for discrimination and hatred.

The arguments in favour of single faith schools are simple. Firstly, parents believe that their children achieve better in such schools (though there is considerable evidence that the academic superiority of religious schools is dependant on catchment areas and middle-class intake). Secondly, many parents want their children taught in an atmosphere which reflects their own beliefs and culture. Thirdly, on the grounds of equality, it is clearly illogical to say it’s all right to have Anglican schools and teacher training establishments, but not all right to have Hindu ones.

The arguments against go to the heart of how we live in a multi-cultural society. If children grow up only knowing those who share the belief systems of their family, never meeting those with different views, from different cultures, then we will eventually have a segregated society, with all the potential for violence and hatred that that can lead to. For those in favour of a secular education system, it is simply not appropriate to spend public money on pushing the tenets of a particular faith, whatever that faith may be. This does not of course impact on the right of cultural minorities to teach their own culture, language and belief systems in privately-funded establishments outside normal school hours.

The problem the United Kingdom has now is that it never grasped the nettle of secularising education and now is left with what seems like a discriminatory situation. It is true that many Anglican schools and HE colleges will be very low-key in their religious approach, but they remain Christian foundations. It is clear if more schools for those from minority faiths were created, they would be likely to be far more passionate in promoting their faiths than many of the existing Christian schools are. But can the UK justify denying the right to ‘faith schools’ to other religions, when it continues to grant it to Christianity?

A compromise position might be to require all state-funded schools, including faith schools, to educate pupils about all major faiths and about humanism and atheism, and to promote non-discriminatory behaviour (including in relation to gender, disability, sexuality and marital status, regardless of the teaching of particular faiths). ‘Contract compliance’ with such diversity standards should form part of the pre-condition for state funding of any educational institution, and compliance should be verified by inspection. What must not be allowed to happen is the selection of pupils/students in any educational institution on the basis of faith alone.
Discrimination on the Grounds of Religion or Belief

NATFHE needs to develop policy in this area. We have never campaigned for a secular education system, and have accepted the continuation of many teacher training colleges (now colleges of HE) as Christian foundations. The Government is clearly now hesitating as to how to proceed. It appears determined to go ahead with its plan for more faith schools, but to hedge them about with so many conditions that many applicants may prefer to set up private schools. Perhaps one way forward is to work, not for the extension of religious educational establishments to other religions, but for the gradual severance of the link between state-funded education and Christianity.

The Right to Have No Religion

We need to be very clear about the fact that, both from the legal and moral point of view, the principle of non-discrimination on religious grounds extends to those who have no religious belief.

The Human Rights Act refers to ‘the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion’. The European Employment Framework Directive stipulates outlawing discrimination on the grounds of ‘religion or belief’. It should be obvious, but perhaps there is no harm in stating it, that not all beliefs are religious beliefs. ‘Thought, conscience and religion’ has been interpreted very widely under the Human Rights Act. A commitment to secularism or humanism or socialism is as much a belief system as any of the major religions, and deserves to be treated with the same respect. People with a passionate commitment to the value of all living things, which caused them to be vegans, would have as much right to complain of discrimination if the canteen did not meet their dietary requirements as would Muslims who could not get halal food.

The latest research shows that only 9% of the population state they have no religion. It will be interesting to see what the census reveals. The categories set out in the census were (in the order they appeared on the form) None; Christian (include all Christian denominations); Buddhist; Hindu; Muslim; Sikh; Jewish; Other (please give details). Those saying ‘None’ are likely to be a minority, but a significant minority.

In employment terms, the difficult area will be the permission for organisations ‘the ethos of which is based on religion or belief’ to exercise ‘a difference of treatment based on a person’s religion or belief’. Once again, the issue of faith schools and colleges raises its head. In a situation where the majority, or a very significant number, of educational establishments have a religious foundation, this could clearly lead to very serious discrimination in the job market for teachers. If all schools were faith schools, where would atheist teachers be employed? This may be an area we have to fight hard on in the future.

Currently however, the vast majority of colleges and universities are not religious foundations. It is important that in producing policies and procedures to remove discrimination against members of minority faiths, we do not introduce a new form of discrimination against those of no faith – hence the emphasis in the Model Policy in the centre pages on the contractual hours and days remaining the same for all staff; and the provision for those of no faith to book three days of their leave at times of special significance to them. The aim should be to produce equality of respect and treatment for all, not to set up a different hierarchy of belief systems.
The main principle behind this document can be summed up as 'Everyone has the right to their own belief system, but has no right to enforce it on others' (see Model Policy – centre pages). NATFHE has a deep and longstanding commitment to equality, and it is high time that we paid more attention to the discrimination faced by members of minority religions. We should be wholehearted in our attempts to see that the privileges extended to Christians in general and Anglicans in particular are dismantled. It is clearly right for example, that the facility to celebrate your major religious festivals away from work be extended to everyone.

The difficulty arises in the conflict between manifesting religion or belief, and how that impacts on what Article 9 of the Human Rights Act calls ‘the protection of the rights and freedoms of others’. Women teachers may fear that if there is a growth of schools with an extreme religious programme, their rights to choice of dress, life-style and equal status within such schools will be severely compromised. The fact that the European Framework Directive requires the outlawing of discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief, and of sexual orientation at precisely the same time is going to present lawyers drafting the legislation with the biggest headache imaginable. Nearly all the world’s major religions are un-accepting of lesbian and gay sexuality, and extreme adherents of all faiths can be virulent in their condemnation. The Christian Institute, for example, has said that the fact that The General Teaching Council has issued a charter which requires all teachers to combat discrimination on a wide range of grounds, including sexuality, means that Christian teachers will not be able to teach in state schools. Would being openly gay or lesbian be an acceptable reason for denying employment as a teacher in a faith school? To rephrase a previous question, if all schools were faith schools, where would lesbian and gay teachers be employed?

Just how this circle can be squared will probably require a number of cases to be brought, however carefully both sets of legislation are framed. No-one should underestimate the difficulty when the ‘rights and freedoms’ of one group are in direct conflict with those of another group. In industrial relations terms, it behoves us to be as clear as possible about what rights and freedoms we want to protect before we seek to negotiate collective agreements.

Based on NATFHE’s existing policies, it is fairly clear what our stance should be. Everyone has a right to their own beliefs, and the right not to be harassed or bullied because of those beliefs. If people choose not to drink alcohol, not to have an abortion, not to have a blood transfusion, not to reveal their legs, they have an absolute right to those choices. In private life, they have a right to mix with those who share their beliefs and practices and delight in their common cultural and religious background.

In the world of work, however, the fact that we do live in a multi-cultural society means that we all have to compromise about how freely we express our prejudices, viewpoints and feelings about the lifestyle of others. Reasoned debate about the existence or non-existence of God obviously comes within the ambit of free speech. Academic freedom must mean the freedom to explore, for example, the nature of the universe, the origins of the species, the reasons for belief and non-belief in an external First Cause. However, simple scorn and verbal abuse of someone for being ‘stupid enough to believe such fairytales’ verges on impinging on the rights of others. Expressing outright contempt for someone because they
either do or do not drink alcohol is an attempt to impose your own cultural norms on those around you. An individual has an absolute right to choose not to have an abortion because of her religious beliefs, but no right to hurl abuse at women who exercise their right to choose abortion. There is a right to believe that God forbids sexual love between two men, but no right to distribute hate literature about gay men in the workplace.

The extreme difficulty of balancing the rights and freedoms of all groups is not a new challenge – embodying that balance in a legal framework is.

8 Conclusion

In some ways, NATFHE is uniquely placed to have an impact in this area. Everyone agrees on the centrality of education in forging greater understanding and tolerance between disparate groups. Further education colleges have always attracted a very varied clientele, and that includes representatives of all faiths in an area. Unlike schools, they have never been ghettoised (whether formally or informally) along ethnic or religious lines.

In cities as disparate as Bradford and Belfast, colleges are uniquely placed. They are not immune to the racial and religious tensions and hatred that exist in such cities, but they do offer an integrated context as a starting point. For many students, arriving at the FE college will be the first time in their lives that they have mixed with a large spectrum of humanity. Previously, at home, at school, in their community, they will only have come in contact with people of the same cultural and religious background as themselves.

Our HE institutions are also melting pots, where students from all the innumerable cultural groups across the British Isles and from all round the world come together.

The challenge to form an educational environment in which ‘freedom of thought conscience and religion’ is a reality, but in which ‘the rights and freedoms’ of all groups are respected is a very great one. But NATFHE members are used to rising to great challenges!
As to religion, I hold it to be the indispensable duty of government to protect all conscientious professors thereof, and I know of no other business which government hath to do therewith.

Tom Paine (1737-1809). *Common Sense*
1. Statement of Intent

(Name of college or university) celebrates and values the diversity brought to its workforce through individuals, and aims to create an environment where the cultural, religious and non-religious beliefs of all its employees are respected.

Through the implementation of the relevant Policies and Procedures, (name of college or university) seeks to ensure that

a) Recruitment and selection are based entirely on relevant criteria, which do not include religious belief or non-belief.

b) Members of any religion or none are treated with equal dignity and fairness.

c) Under-represented groups in society are encouraged to apply for jobs.

d) Where possible, appropriate services are provided to meet the cultural and religious needs of all employees.

The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is absolute, but the right to manifest beliefs is qualified by the need to protect the rights and freedoms of others.

2. Dress Code

i) (Name of college or university) imposes no dress code on its employees, and welcomes the variety of appearance brought by individual styles and choices. The wearing of items arising from particular cultural/religious norms (e.g. hijab, kippah) is seen as part of this welcome diversity.

ii) The only limitations to the above are:

a) Health and safety requirements may mean that for certain tasks specific items of clothing such as overalls, protective clothing etc need to be worn. If such clothing produces a conflict with an individual’s religious belief, the issue will be sympathetically considered by the line manager, with the aim of finding a satisfactory compromise.

b) Dress should conform to the current majority view in our society of what constitutes decency.

c) Wearing of clothing displaying slogans which are discriminatory (e.g. racist or sexist slogans) is forbidden.
3. Cultural and Religious Observance

i) (Name of college or university) will ensure that all staff know that if they have special prayer requirements, they should put in a request to ....... who will ensure that a suitable space for prayer, plus ablution facilities if required, will be made available.

ii) All staff, regardless of religious belief or non-belief, are required to work for.... hours a week. There is considerable flexibility over when these hours are worked. Line managers should make every attempt to ensure that those whose religion requires them to pray at certain times during the day are free to do so. In addition, those who require, for example, an extra hour at midday on Friday, or not to work beyond sunset on Friday, or ever on a Saturday, should be accommodated.

iii) Any weekend working agreements shall ensure that no-one is forced or pressured to work at times when their religious beliefs forbid them to do so.

4. Leave for Religious Festivals

Christians are already granted the facility to have time off for three days of religious significance because these are public holidays. In the interests of equality, those practising other religions or none have an absolute right to book three days of their holiday entitlement on the dates of most significance to them, regardless of the convenience or otherwise to (name of college or university). Further requests for holiday entitlement to be taken at times of religious significance will be treated sympathetically.

The number of annual leave days overall will remain as in the contract of employment, for all staff, of any religious belief or none. (Note: The main religious dates for each year will be made available by the institution through ..... )

5. Extended Leave

i) If staff request extended leave at a particular time for the purpose of going on pilgrimage, the line manager should attempt to agree to the request. If the extended leave exceeds the annual holiday entitlement, the excess days will be unpaid leave.

ii) Staff with relatives abroad may have particular religious/cultural needs for occasional extended leave for births, weddings, deaths. Line Managers should treat such requests for leave sympathetically.

6. Food Requirements

(Name of college or university) undertakes that its canteens will meet the most common religious dietary requirements [e.g. vegetarian, kosher, halal] on a regular basis, in response to the needs of both staff and students. Those with more specialist dietary needs should fill in the appropriate form and return it to the canteen, which will endeavour to meet the requirements.
Implementation and Responsibilities

- (Name of college or university) through its ..... department will make available, where possible and required, provision for ablution and prayer and for specific food requirements.

- (Name of college or university) undertakes that its canteen will meet the most common religious dietary requirements (vegetarian, kosher, halal) on a regular basis.

- All line managers are responsible for familiarising themselves with this policy, and for following it in matters such as requests for leave.

- All individual staff are responsible for familiarising themselves with this policy, for informing appropriate staff of their particular requirements, and for making up any time lost as a result of cultural/religious observance.

- Any member of staff who feels their line manager is not treating them fairly in accordance with this policy should first try to resolve the matter by discussion, and if that fails, take the matter up with their Head of Department. If that fails, the Grievance Procedure can be used.

- All students and visitors with whom staff come into contact have a responsibility not to discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief. If staff feel that such discrimination is occurring, and persists after they have pointed it out to the student or visitor and asked them to stop, they should report the matter to ..., who, acting on behalf of (name of college or university), will take appropriate steps to deal with it.

Please note that everything in this policy has the aim of ensuring equal treatment for all staff, of any religion or none. It is based on the principle that everyone has the right to their own belief system. However, they have no right to enforce it on others.

Any attempt at coercion or bullying of others to comply with a particular belief system, for example through distribution of hate literature, propaganda, offensive remarks, may result in disciplinary action. (Name of college or university) undertakes to remove/paint over any offensive literature or graffiti found on its premises.
If you agree a policy with your institution, please remember to send a copy to:
Equality Unit, NATFHE,
27 Britannia Street,
London WC1X 9JP.
Email: *EqualityUnit@natfhe.org.uk
NB The content of this appendix has been taken entirely from pages of the website of The Religious Resource and Research Centre, University of Derby. The address of the site, which also contains much more useful information, is www.multifaithnet.org. NATFHE would like to thank the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby for permission to reproduce their web-pages. Incidentally, it had been the intention to publish a list of useful addresses with this document, but many religions do not have an official overall web-site, and selecting one above another might cause unnecessary offence. For those who wish to know more, a search entering words such as “Church of England”, “Hinduism in the UK”, “Secularism” will bring you a wealth of information and a variety of sites to choose from.

Short Introductions to the Major Religions

A Short Introduction to Buddhism

Estimated Buddhist Populations
Global: c. 359,982,000
UK: c. 30-130,000

Beginnings of Buddhism
Based on the inheritance of Siddhartha Gautama (Sanskrit form) / Siddhattha Gotama (Pali form). Siddartha Gautama is believed by Buddhist tradition to have been born in the fifth century BCE. He began a six year spiritual search at the age of 29, leading to his Enlightenment under what is now known as the Bodhi Tree, at Bodh Gaya in North India. At the age of eighty he died and entered into his parinirvana/parinibbana (final entry to nirvana).

Central Aspects of Buddhism

The Three Jewels
The idea and practice of the Three Jewels (triratna/tiratana) is central to Buddhists who affirm that:
- I take refuge in the Buddha (the enlightened or awakened one)
- I take refuge in the dharma (the teachings of the Buddha)
- I take refuge in the samgha/sangha (the community of the Buddha)

The Four Noble Truths (Catur Aryasatya/Cattari Ariyasaccani)
The Four Noble Truths express the heart of the Buddhist dharma or teaching:
- Dukkha (Unsatisfactoriness) is seen as the experience of the transitoriness and imperfection of life. It is one of the Three Signs of Being, the others being anitya/anicca (impermanence), and anatman/anatta (no permanent self).
- Samudaya (Origin of Unsatisfactoriness) Dukkha (unsatisfactoriness) is seen as originating in trishna/tanha, a craving which cannot be satisfied and results in attachment to transitory things and rebirth.
• Nirodha (Cessation of dukkha) The overcoming of trishna (craving) is known as nirvana which includes the “quenching” or “extinction” of the thirst and craving that leads to dukkha.

• Marga (The Way) The Arya Ashtangika Marga/Ariya Atthangika Magga (The Noble Eightfold Path – see below) is often known as the Middle Way of life.

The Noble Eightfold Path (Arya Astangika Marga)
The fourth of the Four Noble Truths is the way to overcome dukkha which is the Noble Eightfold Path: Right Understanding; Right Intention; Right Speech; Right Action; Right Livelihood; Right Effort; Right Mindfulness; Right Concentration.

The Five Precepts
The Five Precepts (Panca Silani) are, for lay Buddhists (ordained Buddhists take additional vows), the basis of samyakkarmanta/samma kammanta (Right Action). They include the intention to refrain from: harming living beings; taking what is not given; sexual misconduct and misuse of the senses; harmful speech; drink or drugs which cloud the mind.

Paramitas
In Mahayana Buddhist tradition, there is also a focus on practising the positive paramitas (Perfections), including especially the first six: giving; keeping the moral precepts; patience; strength to persevere; meditation; wisdom.

Meditation
Though practised through a wide variety of methods, meditation among Buddhists can be found in two basic forms: shamatha/samatha (tranquillity) and vipashyana/vipassana (insight) meditation.

Diversity within Buddhism
There are two major traditions or “transmissions” of Buddhism: The Theravada (Way of the elders) and the Mahayana (Great Vehicle), the latter containing a range of schools with differing emphases and practices. There are also some contemporary attempts to evolve western forms of Buddhism.

Theravada
The Theravada (Way of the Elders) tradition is associated particularly with Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and Burma and the southern part of Vietnam and, because of this, it is sometimes known as the Southern Transmission. Theravada Buddhism focuses upon the historical Buddha and its ideal is that of the arahat, the individual who has achieved release from rebirth. It is based upon the Pali canon of scriptures (known as the Tipitaka or the Three Baskets). Some of the earliest material attributed to the Buddha and his disciples is found in this canon which is generally acceptable among all Buddhists. Rather than having distinctive schools as such, the variations within the Theravada tradition owe more to the influence of its varied cultural contexts.

Mahayana
The Mahayana (Great Vehicle) tradition is found in Central Asia, China, Tibet, Korea, Japan and the northern part of Vietnam and, because of this, it is sometimes known as the Northern Transmission. Its special characteristics include belief in many Buddhas who can simultaneously be present and the concept of shunyata/sunnata (Voidness or Emptiness). It also holds the ideal of the Bodhisattva-Mahasattva, a fully perfected being who embodies prajna/panna (wisdom) and karuna (compassion).
Among humans, a Bodhisattva is dedicated to assist in the liberation of all sentient beings. In the Mahayana tradition there are a number of canons of scripture including the Agama; the Chinese Canon (the Ta’s’ang-ching or Great Scripture Store); and the Tibetan canon. The varied schools within Mahayana Buddhism reflect either different cultural influences or the role of particular texts or sutras. Tibetan Buddhism began c755-797CE and contains four main lineages: the Nyingmapa; the Sakyapa; the Kagyu; the Gelugpa. Ch’an (Chinese) Buddhism Ch’an was introduced to China in the 6th century CE. Zen (Japanese) Buddhism has two main lineages: Rinzai Zen, which began in the 9th century and reached Japan in the 12th century; Soto Zen, taken to Japan in the 8th century. Pure Land Buddhism has two main Japanese branches: Jodo Shu (Pure Land School); Jodo Shinshu (True Pure Land School, often simply known as Shin). Nichiren Buddhism has its origins in the work of the Japanese teacher Nichiren (1222-282CE).

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For more information on Buddhism,its beliefs,practices,festivals,and forms of organisation in the United Kingdom,together with contact details for its local, regional and national organisations,see the chapter on “Introducing Buddhists in the UK”,In P. Weller (ed), Religions in the UK:Directory, 2001-3, The Multi-Faith Centre, Derby, 2001.

A Short Introduction to Christianity

Christian Populations

Global: c. 1,999,564,000
UK: c. 38,100,000

Beginnings of Christianity

Christianity has its roots in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth within the context of the Jewish community. As it developed and spread, it increasingly included those of a non-Jewish background and suffered persecution under a number of Roman Emperors, until the conversion of the Emperor Constantine, after which it became adopted as the official religion of the Empire. From the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards, Christianity developed missionary movements which, at their peak in the nineteenth century, led to Christian Churches being established throughout the world. This, in turn, laid the basis for the modern ecumenical movement towards the unity of global Christianity in which the global profile of Christianity has shifted to Africa and Latin America.

Central Aspects of Christianity

Creation and Salvation

Christianity affirms that the creative intention of God is for a world characterised by peace and unity, and that the purpose of human life is to glorify and enjoy God and the creation. However, Christianity also teaches that human beings and the world in which they live have gone fundamentally wrong. Without the intervention of the divine, Christianity sees human beings as being locked into a state of sin
which is characterised by self-centredness. Through the life and teaching of Jesus, Christians believe that the possibility of forgiveness and renewal of life has been opened up to human beings and to the creation as a whole. Responding in faith to the grace of God is seen as the means of overcoming sin and achieving the wholeness of salvation, by means of the operation of the Holy Spirit of Jesus within the lives of believers. The qualities of faith, hope and love are seen as of eternal value, and Christianity teaches that the fruits of the operation of the Spirit are: love; joy; peace; patience; kindness; goodness; faithfulness; humility; self-control.

**The Person of Jesus**

Christians believe that the nature of the divine has been revealed most clearly through the life, death, resurrection and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth whom they believe to be the promised Messiah of Jewish expectation. Jesus offered hope to the marginalised and called upon people to repent of their sins and receive God’s forgiveness, warning against the dangers of religious self-righteousness. Through Jesus, Christians see the nature of the divine as being characterised by “agape” or self-giving love. Christians affirm the incarnation of one God in the person of Jesus, but also that God’s activity is not restricted to the person of Jesus. This is a conviction that is expressed in the apparently paradoxical belief that the one God is a Trinitarian God, experienced as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all things, often referred to in terms of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

**Scriptures, Creeds and Tradition**

The Christian scriptures, known collectively as the Bible, are central to Christian belief and practice. Some believe them to be the literal words of God whilst others see them as human writings informed by the Spirit of God. The creeds, the most important of which are the Apostle’s Creed and the Nicene Creed, include summaries of orthodox beliefs which were formulated in the early years of Christianity. For Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Anglican Christians, the teachings of the early Church Fathers are seen as another important source of authority.

**The Church**

The Church is the community of Christian believers, formed by those who look to God’s grace for their acceptance by God and one another. The Church is understood as having four distinctive marks that characterise it. It is: one, in terms of the basic unity of all who confess Jesus as Lord; holy, in terms of its belonging to the Lord and its living accordingly; Catholic, in terms of its universal inclusivity of people of all kinds; Apostolic, in terms of the continuity of its inheritance from the first disciples. Baptism marks entry into the Christian Church. Among Anglican, Roman Catholic, Reformed, and Orthodox Christians, baptism is usually offered to babies or infants. Among Baptists, Pentecostals and others, baptism is seen as being appropriate only for those who can personally confess a Christian faith. In those traditions that baptise babies and infants, the rite of confirmation is seen as an opportunity personally to affirm an infant baptism, although some Churches administer instead what they describe as “reception into membership”.

**Mission and Discipleship**

Christians have a commitment to spread the message of Christianity. They understand this to be commanded by Jesus and Good News to announce. For some Christians, this commitment is expressed in terms of organised forms of mission activity. The teaching of Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, is central to the form of discipleship to which Christians are called, which involves them in trying to follow the example and pattern of Jesus in their own lives. Christianity has a strong tradition of social concern.
Service to the hungry, the sick and the imprisoned is seen as being the authentic expression of Christian commitment and believing.

Diversities in Christianity

Many beliefs and practices are shared by all Christians. However, there are also distinct teachings and organisational forms for various Christian traditions, the largest of which are the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant and Pentecostal traditions. Following Christianity’s adoption as the official religion of the Roman Empire, the Empire began increasingly to become separated into Eastern and Western parts which was also mirrored in the development of differences between the Churches of the East and West. A formal division opened up in 1054 leading to the development of the Western Catholic and Eastern Orthodox forms of Christianity. With the Protestant Reformation, Western Christendom diversified further into national Churches closely aligned with local rulers and Free Churches that sought an independent congregational life separate from the structures of the state.

Catholic

The Catholic Church includes around half of all Christians in the world and sees itself as directly inheriting an apostolic line of succession from the earliest Christian leaders. It is led by the Pope.

Orthodox

The Orthodox Churches of Christianity see themselves as being in continuity with the undivided Church before its separation into Eastern and Western traditions. Orthodox Churches are independently governed, each with their own leaders who are bound together by their recognition of an Ecumenical Patriarch, the Patriarch of Constantinople.

Protestant

Protestant Churches vary considerably, and especially concerning forms of Church organisation and government. They emphasise the supremacy of scriptural authority and of faith in Jesus. They include the following denominational forms: Baptist; Brethren; Congregationalist; Lutheran; Methodist; Moravian; Presbyterian; Reformed; Salvationist. Churches of the Anglican tradition see themselves as both Reformed and Catholic. They are autonomous Churches that look for international leadership to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Pentecostal

The Pentecostal tradition emerged within the broader Protestant tradition and additionally emphasises the possibility of contemporary sharing of the spiritual gifts and experience of the earliest Christians. Restorationist and House Church Movements have more recently emerged seeking what they believe to be more biblical forms of Church life. In a number of parts of the world, but especially in Africa, indigenous forms of Christianity have developed and are seen by many as more authentically inculturated expressions of the Christian faith than the traditions imparted by missionaries.

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A Short Introduction to Hinduism

Hindu Populations

Global: c. 811,366,000
UK: c. 400,000-550,000


Beginnings of Hinduism

Hinduism has its origins in the Indian subcontinent, although the Hindu way of life is more often referred to by Hindus as the Sanatana Dharma (eternal way of life). Hinduism has no single founding figure or point of historical origin and Hindus perceive the Sanatana Dharma to be eternal. It has developed in very diverse schools of thought, religious practice and focii of devotion.

Central Aspects of Hinduism

The Divine

Hinduism includes both monotheists and monists. The Divine can be understood either as an impersonal Brahman (the Advaita position) or as a Supreme Person (the Dvaita position). Hinduism also has many devas and devis or gods and goddesses, which present aspects of the divine. Among these are: Indra (god of rain); Surya (sun god); Chandra (moon god); Ganesha (remover of obstacles); Yama (god of death); Sarasvati (goddess of learning); Lakshmi (goddess of wealth); Hanuman (the ardent devotee of Rama); Murugan (who, with Ganesha, is one of the two sons of Shiva and Parvati).

Basic Concepts

Alongside the diversities of belief, philosophical orientation and practice that the Hindu tradition as a whole contains, it also shares a number of basic concepts. These are Atman, the eternal principle which animates all life and brings consciousness; Moksha, the liberation which is the ultimate goal of all beings; Dharma, which can mean either “religion”, “law”, “duty” or “righteousness”, depending on the context; Karma, which is that all actions have consequences that shape one’s destiny; Maya, which is life in ignorance of the Sanatana Dharma (the eternal truth).

The Four Aims and Pathways

Hinduism sees human life in terms of four purusharthas or aims. These are: dharma, which is concerned with religious life; artha, which is concerned with economic development; kama, which is an appropriate gratification of the senses; moksha, which is liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Hinduism also traditionally teaches that the spiritual life has four main pathways: karma yoga, which is the way of action; jnana yoga, which is the way of knowledge; raja yoga, which is the way of self-control; bhakti yoga, which is the way of devotion.

The Four Ashramas and Varnas

Hindu life is structured by what is known as Varnashrama Dharma, which is concerned with an understanding of one’s personal and social roles within the totality of life. The four Ashramas are seen in ideal terms as the four stages through which a maturing human life should pass. Whilst in contemporary
life it is not often lived precisely in these terms, its broad outlines remain a powerful influence upon the Hindu perception of life. The ashramas are those of the: brahmacharin, or celibate student; grihastha/grihini, or householder; vanaprastha, or stage of retirement from society (traditionally into the forest); sannyasin, or renunciant who breaks all social ties. The Four Varnas are traditionally seen as complementary in terms of both status and responsibility. Some Hindus see these in primarily hereditary terms, whilst others see them as more qualitative differences. The traditional varnas consist of: Brahmans, comprising the intelligentsia and priests; Kshatriyas, comprising administrators and the military; Vaishyas, comprising the generators and distributors of material wealth; Sudras, comprising labourers and service workers.

Jatis
Associated with the broad, ideal classes of the four varnas, are many thousands of groups known as jatis, many of which are linked with traditional occupational groups. Examples include the following: Patidars, which are traditionally, traders; Mochis, which are traditionally, shoemakers; Lohanas, which are traditionally, traders; Anavil Brahmins, which are traditionally, agriculturalists; Khattris, which are traditionally, priests; Baidyas, which are traditionally, doctors. Some jatis, officially known in India as the “scheduled castes” but now often preferring the self-description of Dalit (oppressed), were among those whom Mahatma Gandhi called Harijans, or children of God.

The Scriptures
There are two broad groupings of scriptures. The first group of sacred writings is known as the shruti (that which is heard) and the second is the smriti (that which is remembered). Some Hindus believe that the shruti and the smriti are on the same level, whilst the majority view is that the shruti are the more authoritative. The shruti include the four Vedas which are said, originally, to have been transmitted orally for many years before they were written down. The Four Vedas are the: Rig Veda, containing mantras for use in worship; Sama Veda, containing sung mantras; Yajur Veda, also containing mantras, and instructions concerning worship; the Atharva Veda, containing mantras to be used in various other ways. Each of the Vedas has four parts: the Samhitas, concerned with recitation; the Brahmanas, concerned with ritual and sacrifice; the Aranyakas, concerned with the role of Vedic rituals in the cosmos; the Upanishads, concerned with the knowledge necessary for self-realisation. The smriti present Hindu teaching in widely accessible ways and have six parts: Itihasa; Purana; Grihya Sutra; Vedanga; Dharma Shastra; Prasthana Vakya. The Itihasas, or stories, contain the two famous epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Ramayana tells the story of how King Rama fought against Ravana and the forces of evil. Rama and his wife Sita are, for many Hindus, models of right living. The Mahabharata incorporates the Bhagavad Gita, or Song of the Blessed Lord, which is the record of a discourse between Krishna and Prince Arjuna and has become a centrally important scripture for many contemporary Hindus because of its teachings about dharma. There are also, in addition, a range of other texts, including the Dharma Shastras, or law books and the Prasthana-vakyas, a range of literature which include, for example, the esoteric Tantras.
Diversity within Hinduism

Philosophical Systems
In classical Hinduism, there are six Darshanas or systems of Hindu philosophy, each of which focuses upon particular aspects of knowledge. These are the: Mimamsa, which focuses upon action with responsibility; Nyaya, which focuses upon logic; Vaisheshika, which is concerned with analysing matter and its structure; Samkhya, which is concerned with how matter functions; Yoga, which offers training for the body and the mind; Vedanta, which is concerned with ultimate reality and spiritual knowledge. The Vedanta, literally meaning “the conclusion of all knowledge”, is the most predominant among contemporary Hindus. It is, however, found in two main forms – the dvaita (dualist) and the advaita (monist). Dvaita is a monotheistic understanding of the nature of the divine, seen in terms of an unlimited supreme personality, in which the divine and the human soul are seen as distinct even though they might enter into union. Advaita is a monistic understanding in which there is no ultimate difference between the divine, understood as Brahman, and the human soul. Realisation of the identity between God and the soul that brings about liberation. Brahman is seen to have been manifested in many different times and places. Among its various schools of thought, the Vedanta encompasses a range of emphases, including: Advaita Vedanta; Vishishta-Advaita; Navya Vishishta-Advaita; Shuddha-Dvaita; Dvaita-Advaita; Shuddha-Advaita; Achintya-Bhedha-Abheda; Shaiva Siddhanta.

Sampradayas
In devotional practice, Hindus focus upon ishta-devata, their chosen deity. This focus of devotion is often associated with a particular sampradaya or movement: Vaishnavas worship Vishnu in terms of the Dvaita understanding; Shaivas worship Shiva; Shaktas worship Shakti or Durga/Parvati/ the Goddess; Swaminarayans build upon the teaching of Sahajananda Swami; Pushtimargis follow the teachings of Vallabha and worship Krishna; Krishna Consciousness follows the teachings of A C Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada; Arya Samajis devotees follow the teachings of Swami Dayananda Saraswati. There are many other groups and movements which have been informed by Hindu philosophy and practice, such as the Divine Life Society and the Transcendental Meditation movement.

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A Short Introduction to Islam

Muslim Populations

Global: c.1,888,243,000
UK: c. 1,000,000-1,500,000

Beginnings of Islam

Over a period of twenty-three years, from the age of forty, the Prophet Muhammad (570-632CE) is believed by Muslims to have received a series of revelations from God through the Angel Jibreel (Gabriel). The founding event of the Muslim community or ‘Ummah, was Muhammad’s 622CE five hundred kilometer migration, or Hijra, from Makka in Arabia to Madina. This marks the beginning of the Muslim dating system, “A.H.” (after Hijra). From Arabia, Islam spread into the Indian sub-continent, Africa and Europe, growing especially strongly in India during the Moghul empire (1516-1707CE). From India, Islam spread to Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines and beyond.

Central Aspects of Islam

Revelation

Islam is based on a belief in revealed truth. The revelations through Muhammad are not seen by Muslims as instituting a new faith. Muslims therefore affirm belief in the Torah of Moses and the Injil, or Gospel, of Jesus. Muhammad is seen as the “seal” of the prophetic succession, bringing a revelation in the Arabic language that both called people back to the original teachings of the previous prophets and fulfilled them. The core of Islam’s revealed message is seen as “submission” to God. Islam has six fundamental beliefs, as follows: the oneness of God; the books revealed by God; the prophets; the angels; the Day of Judgement; life after death.

The Qur’an

The Qur’an is seen as a “miracle” and “sign” of God, containing the actual words of God. As the language in which it was revealed, Arabic is seen as very important for understanding its real meaning. The opening “surah” or chapter of the Qur’an, called the Fatiha, is seen as providing a summary of Islam. It reads: “In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Praise to God, Lord of the Worlds, the Merciful, the Compassionate, King of the Day of Judgement. You alone we worship, you alone we beseech. Lead us in the straight path, the path of those upon whom is your grace, not of those upon whom is your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray.”

Shari’ah

The Shari’ah (law) offers an integrated source of guidance for the daily life of Muslims. Together with the Qur’an, it has three other sources: The Sunna as model example of the Prophet’s life; The Hadith, which are collections of recognised traditions recording Muhammad’s words and actions, together with those of his companions; Ijma, which is the process of attaining consensus in relation to the interpretation and application of Shari’ah where it might otherwise be unclear; Ijithad (the Sunni term) or ‘Aql (the Shi’a term) which refers to the use of reason. One form of this is Qiyas, or analogy. However, many Sunni Muslims argue that, in the tenth century CE, “the gates of ijithad” became closed.
The Five Pillars
The essentials of Muslim practice are set out in what are known as the “Five Pillars of Islam”. These are: Shahadah, the declaration that there is no god except God and that Muhammad is his messenger; Salat, which is prescribed prayer conducted five times daily. These are: Fajr, at dawn; Zuhr, at midday; Asr, in the afternoon; Maghrib, after sunset; Isha, in the night. Zakat, which is a contribution to the needy consisting of two and a half per cent of the total of an individual’s annual income and savings (an additional contribution, known as Sadaqa al-Fitr, is expected during the month of Ramadan, once fasting is finished. Ramadan, which is a month of spiritual dedication embodied in abstaining from food, drink and sexual intercourse from before dawn until after sunset. Hajj, a pilgrimage to Makka, required once in a lifetime of those Muslims who can afford it. It includes a visit to the Ka`bah (the House of God) and involvement in a range of rituals in the neighbourhood of Makka.

Diversity Within Islam
Sunni
90% of the Muslims of the world are Sunnis. The name Sunni relates to the “sunna” of Islamic law, and Sunnis therefore see themselves as those who “adhere to the sunna”. The Caliphate (vice-regency) was established to lead the Muslim community following the death of Muhammad. Sunni Muslims recognise Abu Bakr, `Umar, `Uthman and `Ali as al-khulafa ar-rashidun (the rightly guided Caliphs). The Umayyad (661-750CE) dynasty (centred upon contemporary Syria) was followed by the Abbasid dynasty (centred upon Baghdad), but with a rival, second Umayyad dynasty being founded in Cordoba in Spain from 929CE. This was followed by the Fatimid dynasty from 969CE, which was based in Cairo and survived into contemporary times with the Ottoman Empire. Among Sunni Muslims four recognised madhahib or madhhabs (schools of law for applying the common usul al-fiqh or principles of Islamic jurisprudence) can be found. These recognise each another as authentically Islamic. The Hanafi predominates in India and the majority of the former Ottoman Empire, and can also be found in Egypt. The Malikí predominates in West Africa and the Arab West, and can also be found in Egypt. The Shafi`i predominates in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, and is also important in Egypt. The Hanbali is found in Saudi Arabia and Qatar. There are also a number of groups and movements, each with their own particular emphases, although those who identify primarily with one or another tendency may also relate to others. Among Muslims with connection to South Asian origins these groups and movements include: Barelwis; Deobandis; Tablíghi Jamaat; Ahl-i-Hadith; Jamaat-i-Islami.

Shi`a
The Shi`a tradition emerged from those early Muslims who argued against Abu Bakr and for `Ali ibn Abi Talib’s appointment as the Prophet’s successor. The word “Shi`ite” comes from “shiat `Ali”, meaning “the follower of `Ali”. A series of disputes and wars developed until Husayn, who tried to lead a revolt to reinstate what he saw as the legitimacy of the Caliphate, was killed by the armies of the Caliph Yazid in the Battle of Karbala. Husayn is seen as a model in the struggle against injustice and his death informed the distinctive motifs of suffering and persecution which can now be found in the Shi`a tradition. The descendants of `Ali are seen as having special leadership roles. They are seen as Imams or Hujjah (Proofs of God), and are believed to be chosen by God to interpret the Qur’an and guide the community. The Shi`a tradition also includes a number of schools, based on differences concerning the succession of Imams following Ali. Twelvers (or `Ithna Asherites) are the majority grouping, who believe in a succession
of twelve Imams. The last of these is believed to be still alive, although last seen in 873CE. He is thought
to be waiting to appear as the Mahdi (Guided One). The Seveners. The Ismailis are known as this
because, following the first six Imams, they then affirm the Imamship of sixth Imam’s eldest son. The
Ismailis include Agha Khanis or Nizaris, who understand the Aga Khan to be their living Imam who will be
succeeded by a member of his family.

Tasauwwuf
Tasawwuf or Sufism is the mystical strand of Islam with which both some Sunni and Shi`ia Muslims
identify. It is thought to derive from the Arabic word “suf”, meaning wool. Sufism emphasises the inner
aspects of Islam as well as the external aspects based upon Shari`ah. It finds organisational expression in
a range of Sufi Orders, each of which are led by shaykhs or pirs and are linked by lines of spiritual
initiation known as sisilahs. These Orders include the: Naqshbandi; Chishti; Suhrawardi.

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For more information on Islam,its beliefs.practices,festivals,and forms of organisation in the United
Kingdom, together with contact details for its local, regional and national organisations, see the chapter
on “Introducing Muslims in the UK”, in P. Weller (ed), Religions in the UK: Directory, 2001-3, The Multi-

A Short Introduction to Judaism

Jewish Populations
Global: c. 14,434,000
UK: c. 283,000
(UK Estimates taken from P. Weller (ed.), Religions in the UK: Directory, 2001-3, The Multi-Faith Centre,
Derby, 2001, pp.30-35; global estimates from D. Barrett, World Christian Encyclopaedia: A Comparative
Survey of Churches and Religions, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000.)

Beginnings of Judaism
The historical roots of Judaism are traced by Jews to a Brit, or covenant, through which God is believed
to have formed a permanent relationship with the community. This was first of all through Abraham,
who is seen as the patriarch of the Jewish people, and then through the giving at Mount Sinai of the
Torah, or law, to Moses. The Exodus of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt is seen as constitutive of
the Jewish people who, following this and the receipt of the Torah,conquered the land of Canaan which
they believed was a land promised to them by God. Following their establishment in the Promised Land
and the building of a Temple as a focus of worship in Jerusalem, the Jewish experience became one of
exile. Initially, there was the 586BCE Babylonian conquest and exile and later, after the restoration of a
Jewish kingdom and the rebuilding of the Temple, the destruction of the Temple by the Roman Empire in
70 CE,leading to a further diaspora or dispersion of the people. By the twentieth century there were
Jewish communities in many countries throughout the world. But in 1948, following the Holocaust of
European Jewry, the modern State of Israel was founded and once more became a central focus of
Jewish life.
Central Aspects of Judaism

Torah and Halakah

Judaism is rooted in the Torah which contains 613 commandments or mitzvot which are seen as the revelation of God and the basis of the covenantal relationship between God and the people, leading to a community life centred upon the interpretation and practice of the Halakhah (Jewish law). For male Jewish babies, this covenantal relationship is initially signified by the rite of circumcision. At the age of thirteen there is the Barmitzvah (son of commandment) ceremony in which a young adult becomes a fully responsible member of the community. In Progressive Judaism this has been paralleled by the introduction of Batmitzvah (daughter of commandment ceremony) ceremony for females. To remind Jews of the centrality of the Torah, Jewish homes have on their doorframes a mezuzah or parchment scroll in a small hollow box, which contains the first paragraphs of the Shema, or basic prayer of Jewish belief.

Scriptures

The Torah consists of the five books of Moses: Genesis; Exodus; Leviticus; Numbers; Deuteronomy. The Jewish scriptures also include the books, known as the Nevi‘im, of the prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and others; historical books such as Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings; other texts like Ruth and Esther, known as the Ketuvim; and also the Psalms, Proverbs and Song of Songs.

Talmud

The tradition is seen as a living one, the interpretation and application of which is collected in the Talmud, which is organised into two parts, the Mishnah and the Gemara and Orthodox Jews believe this tradition which includes oral material originally also revealed at Sinai. The Mishnah comprises six sedarim, or orders: zera‘im, which contains prayers and agricultural laws; mo‘ed, which treats matters concerned with the shabbat and festivals; nashim, which covers marital and divorce laws; nezikin, which is a book of civil and criminal law; kodashim, which contains the laws of sacrifice and Temple ritual; tohorot, which contains laws on personal and religious purity. The Gemara comments on, and discusses, the Mishnah. The legal material in the Talmud is known as Halakhah, whilst the non-legal materials are known as the Aggadah.

Midrash

Following the destruction of the Temple in 70CE, a rabbinic form of Judaism developed. Midrash is rabbinic teaching on the Bible, some of which may date from 400-500CE, but which in later collections reflects considerable development of the tradition.

Ethical Monotheism

Judaism is a monotheistic religion in which the oneness and righteousness of God is proclaimed. As a consequence, the tradition has a strong emphasis on peace and justice and Jews have looked forwards to the promise of God’s kingdom being established on earth, a conviction that has traditionally been connected with belief in a coming Mashiach or Messiah.

The Land

There has always been a strong connection between Judaism and the Land of Israel. Even when much of the physicality of that connection was broken by exile, it remained a focus of hope and longing. For
many Jewish people this is expressed today in some form of Zionism, which is understood within the Jewish community as a movement to end centuries of exile. However, some Haredim (or Ultra-Orthodox) distinguish between the state of Israel and the Land on the basis that a secular state cannot be religiously significant.

**Shabbat and Kashrut**

The weekly Shabbat, or Sabbath, is at the heart of Jewish individual and corporate life. In its abstainance from work, it reflects the seventh day of creation in which God is said to have rested from creating the world. The interpretation of what work entails varies within Judaism, but among all it is intended to be a time of shared joy. Another permeative dimension of Jewish life is its food regulations, in terms of what is kosher (permitted) or treif (forbidden).

**Diversities in Judaism**

Communal belonging is an important part of Jewish identity and anyone born of a Jewish mother, or anyone who has converted to Judaism, is traditionally understood to be Jewish. Nevertheless, there are diversities within the religious traditions of the Jewish community.

**Orthodox Judaism**

The Orthodox see the Torah and the Talmud as containing God’s literal words which must be applied equally in all times and place. Orthodoxy includes: Hasidim, who originated with followers of the teachings of Israel ben Eliezer; Haredim, sometimes referred to by others as Ultra-Orthodox.

**Progressive**

Progressive Jews believe in the divine inspiration of the Torah but also, since it was recorded by human beings in a particular time and space, that it is necessary to reinterpret it in changing times and conditions. Progressive Judaism includes: Reform Judaism, established in early nineteenth century; Liberal Judaism, originally an historical offshoot of the Reform movement.

**Conservative**

Conservative Jews wish to remain strongly committed to the Halakhah whilst accepting the inevitability of its contextualised application.

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A Short Introduction to Sikhism

Sikh Populations
Global: c.23,258,000
UK: c. 350,000-500,000

Beginnings of Sikhism
Sikhism is rooted in the teachings of the ten Gurus, the first of which was Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539), who was born at Talwandi in the Punjab. At the age of around thirty, he received a call to preach the Word of God. His message emphasised the oneness of God and the importance of honesty and integrity in the practice of any religion. The community that he founded became known as Sikhs, meaning disciples, or learners. In 1699, the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, instituted Amrit Pahul which initiates Sikhs into the Khalsa Panth, the community of initiated Sikhs.

Central Aspects of Sikhism
The Nature of Sikhism
The Rahit Maryada is the Sikh Code of Conduct published by the Amritsar-based Shromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee that organises and administers many gurdwaras, hospitals and other Sikh institutions within the Punjab. The Rahit Maryada defines a Sikh as a believer in the following: Akal Purakh (the one immortal God); the ten Gurus; the Guru Granth Sahib; the Gurbani; Amrit Pahul and adheres to no other religion.

The Divine
Sikhism is monotheistic and God is known among Sikhs by a variety of names including Ram, Mohan, Gobind, Hari, Nirankar, although Satnam (meaning “true name”) and Waheguru (meaning “Wonderful Lord”) are among the most used. The Mul Mantar is seen as encapsulating the heart of Sikhism. It states: “There is but One God, the Eternal Truth, the Creator, without fear, without enmity, timeless, immanent, beyond birth and death, self-existent: by the grace of the Guru, made known.”

The Gurus
The Ten Gurus and their teaching, known as the Gurbani or Gurshabad, is viewed as a unity. The Ten Gurus are: Guru Nanak Dev (1469-1539); Guru Angad Dev (1504-1552); Guru Amar Das (1479-1574); Guru Ram Das (1534-1581); Guru Arjan Dev (1563-1606); Guru Hargobind (1595-1644); Guru Har Rai (1631-1661); Guru Har Krishan (1656-1664); Guru Tegh Bahadur (1622-1675); Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708); After the tenth Guru, the Guru Granth Sahib is seen as embodying the living and authoritative Word of God, whilst temporal authority is seen as vested in the Khalsa Panth, instituted with the initiation of the Panj Pyare (the five beloved ones) by Guru Gobind Singh in 1699.

Scriptures
The Guru Granth Sahib is a title of honour for scriptures which are otherwise known as the Adi Granth and are written in the Gurmukhi script. The Dasam Granth is also an important book which incorporates the work of a number of poets and also writings of Guru Gobind Singh.
**Khalsa Panth**

The Khalsa Panth is seen as a community of equality that recognises no distinction of caste or gender. One who has taken amrit is known as an Amritdhari Sikh. Keshdhari is a term that can be used of Sikhs who adopt a beard, uncut hair and turban whether or not they have taken amrit. Those who believe in Sikhism, but have not yet been initiated or who have lapsed in their practise are sometimes known as Sahajdhari (literally, “slow adopters”). Along with other personal and family names which they may use, all Sikh men have the religious name of Singh, which means “lion”, whilst Sikh women have the religious name of Kaur, meaning princess. Being a member of the Khalsa Panth is outwardly marked by the wearing of the 5 Ks of Sikhism, each of which is understood to be of spiritual and practical significance. They are known as the 5Ks because the Punjabi for each word begins with the “k” sound. The 5 Ks are: Kesh (uncut bodily hair – the hair on the head usually being tied up in the distinctive turban); Kangha (a small comb worn in the hair); Kara (a steel bracelet); Kachh (also known as kachcha or kachha – a garment of knee length and normally worn under other clothes); Kirpan (a ceremonial sword).

**Ethics**

Sikhs are called upon to live according to the Rahit Nama, or Code of Discipline, which is believed to interpret the Gurbani and to be based upon the teachings of Guru Gobind Singh. Human life is seen as the opportunity for achieving mukti, or freedom from the cycle of rebirth, based upon the karam (actions and their consequences) of this life. The barriers to this are seen as: haumai (self-centredness); kam (lust); karodh (anger); lobh (greed); moh (worldly attachment); hankar (pride); To overcome these barriers, the following qualities are needed: santokh (contentment); dan (charity); daya (kindness); parsanta (happiness); nimarta (humility). Sikhism has identified five stages on the journey to the divine: Dharam Khand (realisation of spiritual duty); Gian Khand (divine knowledge); Saram Khand (wisdom and effort); Karam Khand (divine grace); Sach Khand (truth).

**Worship**

Nam Japna, or meditation on God, is seen by Sikhs as both an important individual and congregational activity, with sadh sangat (congregational worship) being seen as particularly important. The spiritual life is seen as being something to be lived fully within this world, including marriage, family and work. The central principles of Sikh living are: nam japna (reciting the name); kirat karna (earning a living by honest means); vand chhakna (sharing with the needy); sewa (service to the wider community).

**Diversity Within Sikhism**

Sikhism does not acknowledge the validity of traditions based on varying doctrines, although there are groupings whose roots are to be found in various revivalist movements founded by individuals known by such titles as Sant, Bhai or Baba. Within the community, there are also social groupings, such as Ramgarhia and Bhatra, which are related to economic categories and family histories. There are also a range of groups and movements that understand themselves as being within the Sikh community but whose self-understanding in this regard is disputed.

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