

Religion, Belief and Equality in Glasgow

An information sharing and gathering event, organised by [Interfaith Glasgow](#) on behalf of [Glasgow Equality Forum](#) (GEF)

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Executive Summary

The event was commissioned by the Glasgow Equality Forum (GEF) and delivered by Interfaith Glasgow in order to bring together representatives of faith and belief communities and equality organisations to:

- build the capacity of people of faith and belief and relevant organisations to identify their rights under the Equality Act 2010.
- discuss how well public sector organisations are meeting people's religious and belief needs, and allow delegates to share their own experiences.

35 participants from diverse sectors and backgrounds attended this half day event. A training workshop was delivered by Interfaith Scotland explaining religion and belief rights and duties under legislation. Participants came from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu, Pagan, Humanist communities as well as those with non-religious beliefs. They discussed how well they believe people's religion and belief needs are being met in Glasgow in an area of their choice: Education, Health and Social Care, Workplaces and Other. Further questions were asked in a detailed confidential evaluation form (see pp. 8-9).

Key Findings

- Religion and belief are too little discussed and this has a negative effect on services, workers and society generally.
- There is a general lack of awareness regarding religion and belief rights under Equality legislation and limited confidence that these needs will be considered seriously if raised.
- More education, training and specific dialogue opportunities are needed to increase people's knowledge and confidence in addressing issues of religion and belief (see p. 7).

Education:

- Teachers require more training so that they can improve the quality of and breadth of education of religion and belief (see more on p. 4).

Health and Social Care:

- There is a need for services that meet the needs of diverse communities and for health and social care staff to receive training in religion and belief (see p. 5).

Workplace:

- There is much more that could be done in workplaces to accommodate religion and belief needs, e.g. prayer breaks and facilities; dietary needs; time off for religious holidays (see p. 6).

Discussion Feedback

Participants were divided into groups of roughly 6 based on their choice of topic, including

- Education
- Health and Social Care
- Workplace

Participants explored two questions:

1. **“How well are Glasgow's public services, institutions and workplaces accommodating people's religion and belief needs?”**
2. **“How does religion and belief relate to other protected characteristics?”**

Education

- “In the school curriculum there should be a broader range of faiths and beliefs covered within RME – including philosophy, Paganism, and Humanism.”
- “We need much more education on religion and belief.”
- “Teachers need training to encourage them to challenge their bias and improve their religious literacy.”
- “Education should teach children about the positive reasons why people follow a religion rather than just what they believe.”
- “Schools should exhibit best practice with regard to meeting dietary requirements and other religious needs.”
- “Bigger organisations have been able to produce resources regarding religion and belief needs that should be shared more widely. For example there is a good booklet in the Spiritual Care Centre in the new Queen Elizabeth Hospital which gives a summary of beliefs.”
- “There is too much focus in education on the Abrahamic faiths. People aren't aware of the dietary needs of Sikhs, for example.”
- Access to appropriate food has improved.

Health and Social Care

- “In hospital you are not always asked your religion but this would be helpful.”
- “Poor mental health is a huge problem and it is not diagnosed so often within BME groups.”
- “Some people within minority communities can ascribe mental health issues to “black magic”, which is a barrier to accessing treatment from health services.”
- “Some communities are less likely to ask for help from social services (e.g. home care for the elderly) because it can be considered shameful not to look after your family yourself.”
- “There is a need for services that cater for specific communities as well as services for all. Are the needs of all faith groups catered for in care homes for example?”
- “There is a need to recruit health service staff who have additional languages so that there is less need for interpreters.”
- “There is a problem with the one size fits all approach in health services.”
- “We would like to see specific services for people with different characteristics, like BME, disabled people, people who are gay.”
- “More training is needed for front line services about being sensitive towards and knowledgeable about religion and belief needs.”
- “More representation of minority communities within governing structures in health and social care are needed.”
- “GP slots are too short for some people with English as a Second Language. GP slots with an interpreter are 10 minutes longer but this is still not enough.”

Workplace

- “Religion is a taboo subject in workplaces, and in the private sector particularly. The neutral policy creates a culture of silence about faith.”
- “In my work I can’t talk about my faith. People there think they are progressive, but make the assumption that only people who are atheists can share their progressive beliefs.”
- “We need to respect people of all faiths and none.”
- “Within recruitment and career progression within the workplace there is a subtle discrimination – often based on your name through which assumptions are made about culture and faith.”
- There is a need for appropriate spaces for prayer – spaces provided are too often used for other things
- Participants would like to see more organisations providing suitable prayer facilities.
- “Organisations should ideally have a clear policy that is accessible to employees stating the organisations’ position on, for example, taking breaks for prayers, and time off for religious holidays.”
- “Staff canteens should take religious dietary needs into account and clearly label food.”

General

- “More training is needed so that staff can better understand and respect religious faith.”
- “We need more education and training on religion and belief which includes: diversity within religions, cultural bias, and intersectionality. People need to understand how complex it all is.”
- “We need more interfaith events – so that we can learn to value and respect other people’s views.”
- “We need more dialogues where religion can be talked about openly.”
- “We need more religious education in schools – both primary and secondary.”
- “Best practice is to make events accessible to all. When this isn’t possible, have two events instead of one”.
- “Be conscious that by having an event on a Saturday, Jews are excluded (an example of indirect discrimination).”
- “Faith buildings are often not equipped for people with physical disabilities.”
- “Faith groups could make more use of new technologies to stream services for house-bound people.”
- “Training needed for faith groups on being inclusive towards people with disabilities.”

Participant Evaluation

28 participants completed an evaluation form, 27 of whom felt the event was worthwhile (1 didn't answer).

Most stated that they valued the learning gained from the training, the "good mix" of people, and the opportunity to dialogue with people from other religious traditions and backgrounds.

People valued particularly the opportunity to:

- learn about the difference between direct and indirect discrimination
- discuss important subjects that aren't often addressed
- explore issues affecting different communities
- make useful links that could benefit their community
- brainstorm about possible practical improvements rather than having general conversations.

The majority of participants stated that they felt more informed about:

- Religion and belief rights and duties and equality legislation
- How religion and belief relates to other protected characteristics
- Issues affecting other communities.

When asked what could have been better some people asked for:

- More time for discussion
- Better sound – a mic and a loop system
- More space at the tables.

When asked whether they thought that "discrimination (direct or indirect) in relation to religion or belief is a problem affecting your community or group" 18 people answered "yes", 6 answered "no".

- Two people suggested there was an issue not with discrimination but a feeling that religious belief was not respected in society generally.
- One person said there is an assumption in hospitals that all Asians require halal food. Sikhs require non-halal, strictly vegetarian food with no eggs.
- Two people commented that discrimination is mostly indirect. E.g. scheduled events only being held on Saturdays (thus excluding observant Jews).

When asked whether they think members of their “community or group are aware that they are entitled to make requests of their employers and services to accommodate their religion and belief needs,” 12 answered “No” and four were unsure. Eight answered “yes”

- Three pointed out that awareness of rights doesn’t mean people have the confidence to ask that they be met. Lack of confidence can be caused by: “fear of calling someone out”, “in case it negatively affects their standing” and “they don’t know the channels to go through to find help”.
- One commented that awareness is lower amongst BME communities
- One commented that awareness is lower amongst the unemployed. They added “There is not much contact between the ‘formal sector’ and communities.
- One commented that “often non-religious people don’t realise that a non-faith philosophy is also protected under law.”

When asked whether they “felt confident that such a request would be taken seriously and dealt with fairly”, 11 people answered that they were unsure. Four answered “To some degree”, seven said “Yes” and one said “No”. Comments included:

- “Sometimes, but it may take a lot of personal energy to get there, so only some people would have the time/confidence.”
- “In some cases yes, but particularly within schools no. Young Humanists are routinely discriminated against in schools and government refuses to deal with it despite the [Humanist] Society taking legal action. There is a fear by authorities of a ‘church backlash’ to accommodating non-religious pupils.”

When asked what steps would they like to see taken as a result of this event many people highlighted the need for more awareness raising – both within faith and belief communities and amongst all employers and services regarding religion and belief rights and duties and best practice guidance.

Specific suggestions included:

- EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission) and SHRC (Scottish Human Rights Commission) could do more in the religion/belief area.
- More events like this and more dialogue.
- More opportunities for different faiths to getting together.
- Presentations to private sector on religion and belief.
- Solutions suggested within the discussions to be taken forward in a practical way.
- More education at school level.

Who We Are

Interfaith Glasgow:

Interfaith Glasgow is a Scottish charity specialising in promoting and facilitating constructive engagement between different faith and belief communities in Glasgow, so as to help create a better-connected, safer, and more harmonious city for all. We aim to deliver innovative programmes of activities aimed, firstly, at increasing friendships and societal interaction between people of diverse faiths and beliefs; secondly, at fostering greater mutual understanding and challenging prejudices and misconceptions; and, thirdly, at increasing opportunities for people from different faith communities to work cooperatively to address issues of common concern. Initially a project of Interfaith Scotland's (the national agency for interfaith dialogue), we have been operating since October 2012 and became an independent charity (SCIO) in May 2016. Our core funding is from the Scottish Government.

Visit Interfaith Glasgow's website to find out more: www.interfaithglasgow.org

Connect with Interfaith Glasgow on Twitter [@interfaithglasg](https://twitter.com/interfaithglasg) and facebook: www.facebook.com/interfaithglasgow

Contact Interfaith Glasgow's Director rose.drew@interfaithglasgow.org , **0141 5570778**

Glasgow Equality Forum:

Glasgow Equality Forum (GEF) is a City wide strategic policy forum which brings together representatives of voluntary sector equality networks in Glasgow to encourage better co-operation and cross-sector engagement on equality issues. Interfaith Glasgow, Faith in Community Scotland and Amina MWRC are associate members of GEF and bring faith based perspectives and expertise to our work.

Glasgow Equality Forum provides strategic and policy expertise, and through the associated equality networks can provide access to wider viewpoints, including opportunities to engage with grassroots community organisations. Forum members can also provide advice and support on effective community engagement. We work with public sector organisations including Glasgow City Council, Glasgow Health and Social Care Partnership and Glasgow Life.

Visit GEF's website to find out more: www.equalityupdates.org.uk

Connect with GEF on Twitter: #gefequality

Contact GEF's Manager lorraine@crer.org.uk, **01414186535**

Useful Resources

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) Advice and Guidance

[An employer's guide to religion or belief in the workplace](#)

[Religion or belief discrimination](#)

This webpage explains

- ⇒ What is religion or belief discrimination?
- ⇒ What the Equality Act says about religion or belief discrimination
- ⇒ What qualifies as a philosophical belief?
- ⇒ Different types of religion or belief discrimination (direct and indirect)
- ⇒ Circumstances when being treated differently due to religion or belief is lawful

ACAS

Acas (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) provides free and impartial information and advice to employers and employees on all aspects of workplace relations and employment law.

Webpage: Religion or Belief Discrimination

<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1856>

Guidance Document, August 2018, "Religion or belief discrimination: key points for the workplace"

<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/1/8/Religion-or-belief-discrimination-key-points-for-the-workplace.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1oPWmKF7XbASfi2AgwglU6x3N9Vfy1xDMSl3-T-hnAdi0EN2xoNEqdkZA>

Interfaith Scotland

Religious Equality training

<https://interfaithscotland.org/get-involved/training>

Interfaith Glasgow

Faith and Belief Awareness Sessions

<http://interfaithglasgow.org/resources-and-publications/>