

Project questions

The project's questions focus on three main areas.

These are:

participation and disclosure; accommodation of religious observances; and discrimination and harassment relating to religion or belief.

These questions include:

- the experiences/perceptions of staff/students in relation to their participation in higher education because of religion or belief
- how staff/students perceive their religion or belief affects their campus social interactions and whether their religion or belief influenced their choice of HEI
- whether staff/students are comfortable disclosing their religion or belief and perceive they can input into design/delivery of their HEI's policies/practices
- how comfortable staff/students are in expressing and/or observing their religion or belief on campus and their perception of how far their HEI accommodates such observance
- where students/staff use targeted or inclusive religion and belief services, or other inclusive arrangements, what reactions (if any) have they received from other staff/students
- the extent to which staff/students are aware, and are making use, of institutional procedures relating to campus discrimination and harassment or, if they are not why that is the case, together with the extent to which they do or do not use external support mechanisms
- what can be done to support HEIs to establish robust reporting evidence gathering and reporting systems, and what can be done to encourage staff/students to use them
- how HEIs respond to reported incidents of discrimination and harassment and what role Students' Unions play in reporting and dealing with these.

Project team

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Religion and Belief in Higher Education



Researching the Experiences of Staff and Students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland

A project commissioned by



and conducted by
The International Centre for Guidance Studies
The Society, Religion and Belief Research Group

Project context and aims

The aim of the project is to develop an evidence base for understanding the experience of staff and students in higher education with a religion or belief.

This will inform the further development of more inclusive policy and practice within the higher education sector that meets legal obligations while also extending good practice.

Over the past few decades, the religious composition of the student and staff bodies in English, Welsh and Northern Irish higher education institutions (HEIs) has changed substantially.

In addition to its growing diversity, the profile of religion and belief has also changed, becoming more visible and public than was previously the case in many institutions.

Part of this relates to social and religious changes in the wider society. These changes have both shaped and been reflected in changes in the law since the passage of the Human Rights Act, 1998. More particularly, since the introduction in England and Wales of the Religion and Belief (Employment) Regulations, 2003 and the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003, institutions have had legal obligations in relation to discrimination, harassment and victimisation on grounds of religion or belief.

Further legal developments, such as the Religious and Racial Hatred Act 2006 and the Equality Act 2006 have created additional obligations, while the new Equality Act 2010 will both extend and integrate these with those relating to age, disability, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation.

Thus all who work and study in higher education need guidance in the policy issues arising and in developing good practice.

At the same time, the evidence base on these matters in higher education is not yet extensive. This research therefore aims to provide a baseline and a model to inform further local evidence-based policy and practice development.

Project design and methods

The project will include a bibliographical survey of relevant literature; questionnaire surveys; and a number of institutional case studies.

Its outcomes will include, for the early new year of 2011, a report for the Equality Challenge Unit. They will also feed into a 2011 dissemination event for the sector.

The bibliographical survey will review relevant evidence, together with policy and practice guidance that pertains to the sector.

The questionnaire will be open to students and to staff in all higher education institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Institutional case studies will be undertaken using observational research, individual interviews and focus groups at seven higher education institutions of different types across England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Further information and news on the project's progress can be obtained via the project website, through which the project surveys can also be accessed and completed. This can be found at www.derby.ac.uk/religion-and-belief-in-HE

The project runs between April 2010 and March 2011, with the main data gathering being complete by the end of December 2010. Its detailed design, steering and writing up is informed by the wider expertise and experience of a Project Design, Steering and Report Group and by a workshop with stakeholders from the higher education sector.

This Design, Steering and Report Group includes individuals with experience of being a student in higher education; of research into higher education, and into religion and belief; of Human Resource and Student Union policy and practice on equality and diversity; and of innovative provision for religion and belief.

Project partners

International Centre for Guidance Studies

The International Centre for Guidance Studies (iCeGS) is an applied research and development unit based within the Faculty of Education, Health and Sciences at the University of Derby. It offers practical solutions to feed into the design of youth policy, adult guidance and workforce development throughout the UK.

Its mission is to be an international centre for excellence at the leading edge of guidance and related lifelong learning research and continuous professional development activities, bridging the gap between policy-makers, researchers, practitioners, managers and trainers.

Society, Religion and Belief Research Group

The Society, Religion and Belief Research Group is committed to producing relevant research in relation to trends in society, religion and culture and to developing new and innovative ways of understanding religion and society.

The group is already home to a three year (2010-2012) research project in the Religion and Society research programme of the Arts and Humanities and Economic and Social Research Councils on 'Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales: Theory, Policy and Practice, 2000-2010'.

Equality Challenge Unit

The Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) supports the higher education sector to realise the potential of all staff and students whatever their race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, religion or age, to the benefit of those individuals, higher education institutions, and society.

ECU is funded by Universities UK, GuildHE, the Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland.