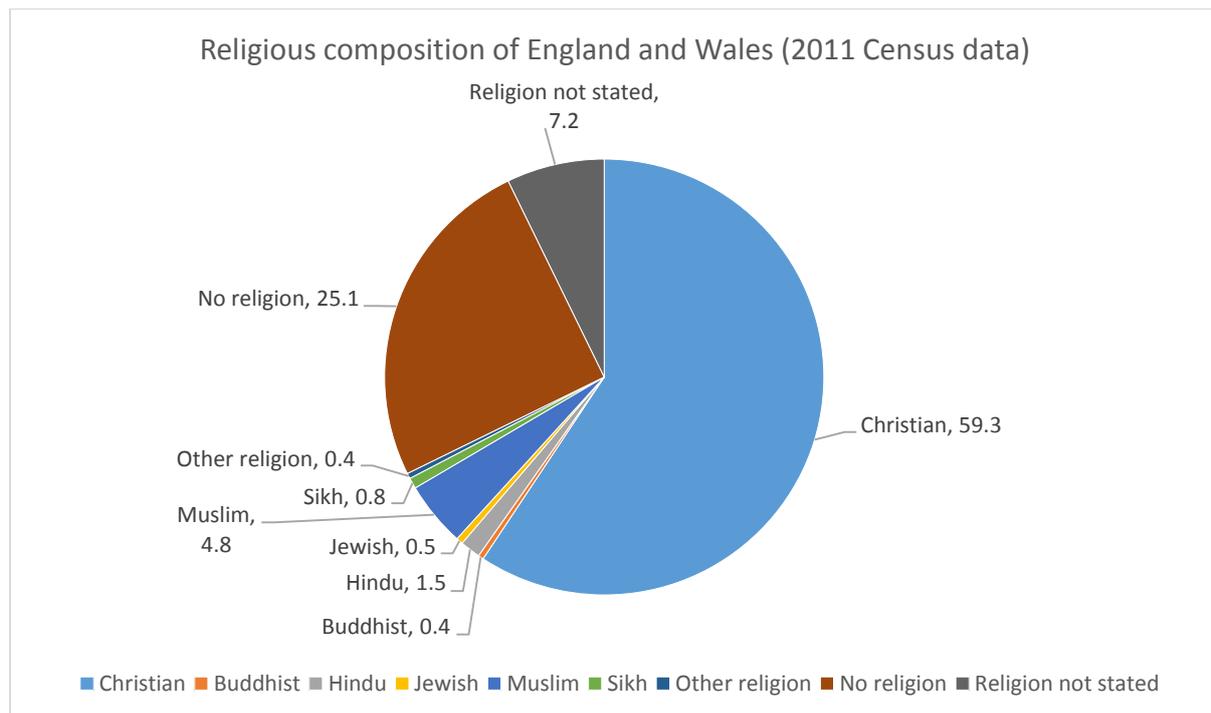


Protected Characteristics : Religion and Belief

In the UK we all have a right choose what religion or beliefs we hold and, of course, to choose NOT to hold any religious views or beliefs. Whilst the UK remains a predominately Christian country there are a significant number of people who follow other religions or who have no religion. No one should be treated less well because of their beliefs.



As long as someone's belief or religion respects the fundamental human rights of others and doesn't cause loss of human dignity they have a right to express it. However not all beliefs have the same level of protection. For example, a strong belief in alien conspiracies does not carry the same weight as belief in an organised religion.

As a rule, people who follow an organised religion or who belong to a smaller religion or sect (such as Rastafarians, Pagans or Scientologists) are protected, as well as people who hold a 'profound belief which affects their way of life or view of the world'. You might be surprised to hear that this can include people who hold strong beliefs about the importance of climate change, animal welfare, spiritualism and even beliefs in the psychic field.

Whatever the legally protected status of a belief, in a positive and inclusive workforce people should feel able to share their thoughts and perspectives on the world in a respectful way and for these views to be treated with dignity.

Sometimes, we need to make special arrangements for people to be able to follow their religions, these are called accommodations. These are because religions are not just a set of beliefs, they also involve doing, or not doing, certain things.

For example, many religions involve wearing particular clothing and jewellery and unless they pose a threat to the health and safety of the wearer or others, it is good to allow people to wear these items. Similarly, some religions have particular dietary requirements so it's important to check whether anyone has any particular dietary needs, when planning catering or events which involve food.

There may also be particular activities at work which people with strong beliefs may wish to avoid and employers should try to accommodate these.

Sometimes people may need time off from work because of their religion, for example, for prayer breaks or holy days. As long as the employee can make the time up these should be accommodated; making adjustments to accommodate these needs is very different from people wanting to take cigarette breaks for example. Making an effort to accommodate people in the workplace helps everyone feel comfortable, engaged and valued. Respecting the rights of others to hold beliefs that are different to your own is central to this and it is not appropriate to attempt to convert other people to your religion or beliefs at work and it can even be seen as harassment if you try to do so.

You also cannot discriminate against someone else because of **your** religion or beliefs; a Christian Registrar may not refuse to conduct a civil partnership ceremony because of their religion, for example.