

REPORT OF THE COMMISSION ON RELIGION
AND BELIEF IN BRITISH PUBLIC LIFE

LIVING WITH DIFFERENCE

community, diversity and the common good

Chair: The Rt Hon Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss GBE

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PREFACE

Religion and belief are driving forces today. Society is not about to return to the past when religion and religious authorities dominated. It is clear, though, that they raise issues that have urgently to be addressed.

The religious landscape in this country has been transformed in the last few decades and now includes a large proportion of people who identify themselves as not religious, and censuses and surveys suggest this proportion is increasing rapidly. At the same time there is a growth in religions other than Christianity, and in branches of Christianity such as the Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

The picture is made more complicated by the growth of fanaticism, by a suspicion amongst many that religion is a significant source of the world's ills, and by a blanket denial by others of the legitimacy of non-religious approaches to life. Forms of hatred such as Islamophobia and antisemitism are also pressing societal issues, not only in the UK but also in many other countries throughout Europe and the wider world.

For these reasons, in September 2013 the Woolf Institute convened an independent commission to undertake over a two-year period the first systematic review of the role of religion and belief in the UK today and to make policy recommendations. Twenty commissioners from across Great Britain and Northern Ireland accepted our invitation to take part and they have been well supported by a hard-working secretariat. Additionally, we have received tremendous support and guidance from our patrons and are deeply grateful for their contributions. We thank all who have given so much time to this endeavour.

The Woolf Institute has been generous in its support but we would also like to acknowledge the financial support of the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Open Society, Davis Foundation and Dominion Trust.

During the two-year period we have been encouraged by the extent of interest the commission generated at local hearings across the country and would like to express our gratitude to those who attended, and to those who sent or emailed more than 200, often lengthy, submissions during the public consultation process. Our gratitude also extends to the organisations across the UK which hosted meetings and public hearings for us.

There has been general agreement that in today's society it is essential not only to understand religion and belief but also to reflect on how they interact with each other at local and national levels. Indeed, it is only with such an understanding that communities can be sustained, and that people can live with difference and contribute to the common good.

We believe this is an important report and ask that its findings be widely considered across the political spectrum by policy makers, government officials, religious leaders and the wider public. We have taken into account an extensive range of different views, and now we commend this report to you.



Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss GBE, PC
Chair
Commission on Religion and Belief
in British Public Life



Dr Ed Kessler MBE
Vice-chair
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in British Public Life

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public life was convened in 2013 by the Woolf Institute, which promotes the multidisciplinary study of relationships between Christians, Jews and Muslims.

The commission's purpose is to consider the place and role of religion and belief in contemporary Britain, to consider the significance of emerging trends and identities, and to make recommendations for public life and policy. Its premise is that in a rapidly changing diverse society everyone is affected, whatever their private views on religion and belief, by how public policy and public institutions respond to social change.

Under the leadership of Baroness Butler-Sloss the 20 commissioners – incorporating adherents of the main religious and belief traditions within the UK, including humanism – have met frequently. They have taken evidence from a wide range of people, and have journeyed around the UK and through its social and economic, religious and cultural, legal and political, academic and educational landscapes. Their report sets out their main conclusions and recommendations.

The changing landscape

Over the past half century, Britain's landscape in terms of religion and belief has been transformed beyond recognition. There are three striking trends:

- **The first is the increase in the number of people with non-religious beliefs and identities.** Almost a half of the population today describes itself as non-religious, as compared with an eighth in England and a third in Scotland in 2001.
- **The second is the general decline in Christian affiliation, belief and practice.** Thirty years ago, two-thirds of the population would have identified as Christians. Today, that figure is four in ten, and at the same time there has been a shift away from mainstream denominations and a growth in evangelical and Pentecostal churches.
- **The third is the increased diversity amongst people who have a religious faith.** Fifty years ago Judaism – at one in 150 – was the largest non-Christian tradition in the UK. Now it is the fourth largest behind Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. Although still comprising less than one in ten of the population, faith traditions other than Christian have younger age profiles and are therefore growing faster.

Furthermore, intra- and inter-faith disputes are inextricably linked to today's geopolitical crises across the Middle East, and in many parts of Africa and Asia. Many of these disputes are reflected back into UK society, creating or exacerbating tensions between different communities.

So twenty-first century ethno-religious issues and identities here in the UK and globally are reshaping society in ways inconceivable just a few decades ago, and how we respond to such changes will have a profound impact on public life.

Learning to live with difference

The resulting uncertainties about national identity, cohesion and community can lead to over-simplistic conclusions about the negative impact of such changes on society. These, in turn, may feed the very anxieties about immigration and the fear of 'the other' that need to be addressed. Certainly the development of public policy related to religion and belief has too often been piecemeal and kneejerk.

The report is intended to be an alternative to such approaches: systematic, consistent and rational, looking at the areas of education, the media, law, dialogue and social action. It seeks to provide a basis for deliberation and policy-making based on research and evidence, the needs of society and the daily experiences of increasingly diverse communities.

Learning to understand and live with differences is the recurring theme throughout the report. It argues that religion and belief are a combination both of conscious choice and of the circumstances of birth, community and public perception. Whether or not we might want to, we cannot ignore or escape the differences that religious traditions make to our sense of personal identity, narrative, relationships and isolation. Religious and belief identities, the report points out, can serve as forces both for good and for ill.

And so the challenge for policy-makers is to create an environment in which differences enrich society rather than cause anxiety, and in which they contribute to its common good.

Vision

The commission's vision is of a society at ease with itself in which all individuals, groups and communities feel at home, and in whose flourishing all wish to take part. In such a society all:

- **feel a positive part of an ongoing national story** – what it means to be British is not fixed and final, for people in the past understood the concept differently from the way it is seen today and all must be able to participate in shaping its meaning for the future
- **are treated with equal respect and concern** by the law, the state and public authorities
- **know that their culture, religion and beliefs are embraced** as part of a continuing process of mutual enrichment, and that their contributions to the texture of the nation's common life are valued
- **are free to express and practise their beliefs, religious or otherwise**, providing they do not constrict the rights and freedoms of others
- **are confident in helping to shape public policy**
- **feel challenged** to respond to the many manifest ills in wider society.

Recommendations

The implications of such a vision for public policy are of many kinds, and are highlighted throughout this report. Prominent amongst them are those which are briefly summarised below. Each is discussed and explained in much fuller detail in the main body of the report.

- **A national conversation should be launched across the UK by leaders of faith communities and ethical traditions to create a shared understanding of the fundamental values underlying**

public life. It would take place at all levels and in all regions. The outcome might be a statement of the principles and values which foster the common good, and which should underpin and guide public life.

- **Much greater religion and belief literacy is needed in every section of society, and at all levels.** The potential for misunderstanding, stereotyping and oversimplification based on ignorance is huge. The commission therefore calls on educational and professional bodies to draw up religion and belief literacy programmes and projects, including an annual awards scheme to recognise and celebrate best practice in the media.
- **The pluralist character of modern society should be reflected in national and civic events** so that they are more reflective of the UK's increasing diversity, and in national forums such as the House of Lords, so that they include a wider range of worldviews and religious traditions, and of Christian denominations other than the Church of England.
- **All pupils in state-funded schools should have a statutory entitlement to a curriculum about religion, philosophy and ethics** that is relevant to today's society, and the broad framework of such a curriculum should be nationally agreed. The legal requirement for schools to hold acts of collective worship should be repealed, and replaced by a requirement to hold inclusive times for reflection.
- **Bodies responsible for admissions and employment policies in schools with a religious character** ('faith schools') should take measures to reduce selection of pupils and staff on grounds of religion.
- **The BBC Charter renewal should mandate the Corporation to reflect the range of religion and belief of modern society,** for example by extending contributions to Radio 4's daily religious flagship *Thought for the Day* to include speakers from non-religious perspectives such as humanists.
- **A panel of experts on religion and belief should be established** to advise the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) when there are complaints about the media coverage in this field.
- **Relevant public bodies and voluntary organisations should promote opportunities for interreligious and inter-worldview encounter and dialogue.** Such dialogue should involve Dharmic as well as Abrahamic traditions, young people as well as older, women as well as men, and local groups as well as national and regional ones. Clergy and other opinion leaders should have a sound understanding of the traditions of religion and belief in modern society.
- **Where a religious organisation is best placed to deliver a social good, it should not be disadvantaged** when applying for funding to do so, so long as its services are not aimed at seeking converts.
- **The Ministry of Justice should issue guidance on compliance with UK standards of gender equality and judicial independence** by religious and cultural tribunals such as ecclesiastical courts, Beit Din and Shari'a councils.
- **The Ministry of Justice should instruct the Law Commission to review the anomalies in how the legal definitions of race, ethnicity and religion interact in practice** and make recommendations to ensure all religious traditions are treated equally.
- **In framing counter-terrorism legislation, the Government should seek to promote, not limit, freedom of enquiry, speech and expression,** and should engage with a wide range of affected groups, including those with which it disagrees, and also with academic research. It should lead public opinion by challenging negative stereotyping and by speaking out in support of groups that may otherwise feel vulnerable and excluded.

I. JOURNEY

The creation of this report

- I.1 The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life was set up in 2013. Its terms of reference were 'to consider the place and role of religion and belief in contemporary Britain and the significance of emerging trends and identities', and 'to make recommendations for public life and policy'.¹ It met frequently between autumn 2013 and autumn 2015 and took evidence from a wide range of people. Its deliberations and encounters had some of the features and qualities of journeys. In addition to literal journeys to all four of the UK's constituent nations and to several different English cities, there were virtual and metaphorical journeys through different spheres of social policy, different academic disciplines, different understandings of the nature and value of religion and belief, and different stories and life-experiences among the individual commissioners, and among those whom they met and consulted.
- I.2 Shortly after it started the commission received an email message from a well-wisher: 'I would like to see,' he wrote, 'the commission focus on problem definition, e.g. the problem of hatred and violence', and he referred to 'the need to study the history of hatred and violence both within and between the Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions and its causes'. With regard to the UK, he wrote that 'you need to study the development of Protestantism especially since say 1700 to the present day and its immense impact on the nation's culture and social history ... [and] could well benefit from studying the Thirty Years War ... [and] should put theology and history together; and maybe derive some useful conclusions and solutions to today's problems'. He ended up with a plea: 'I'm afraid I'd like to see the problems on one side of the paper, and answers on the reverse.'
- I.3 Well, he did acknowledge his hopes and wishes were not in all respects realistic. He won't be surprised to find there's more than a single sheet of paper in this report, or to find that neither problems nor solutions are as succinctly summarised as he ventured to request. And hopefully he won't be too surprised to find the report is not solely about Christianity, Judaism and Islam but also about non-theistic religions and about humanism, agnosticism and atheism. Hopefully, too, he will be glad to see here many references to history, to disharmony and argument within and between religious traditions, and to conclusions and possible solutions. And he will note with approval from the table of contents that the main body of the report is entitled Conversations. It's a review of talking points as well as of endpoints, of journeys as well as of destinations.

Cross-section of modern Britain

... The commission has been set up by the Woolf Institute to consider how, or even if, religion fits into British society and how it affects the idea of Britishness. I attended an event hosted by the University of Birmingham to get young people's views on the subject. Never in my life have I sat around a table with such a varied group of people. Going round the table with the obligatory icebreaker ... was more like going round the history of the world as the multitude of backgrounds, occupations and beliefs were introduced. Around my table Sikhs, Hindus, Humanists, Catholics, Muslims, Evangelicals and atheists represented a handful of the different standpoints around the room, but crucially we represented a cross-section of modern Britain.

from a blogpost about one of the commission's hearings

- I.4 The points are clustered into six separate conversations which consider vision, education, media, dialogue, action and law. Each conversation is arranged in the same threefold way: context and background; challenges and concerns; ways forward. Our correspondent may feel at times, in each conversation as he journeys through it, that he gains no more than 'a new confusion of ... understanding' or, at best, 'a new understanding of ... confusion'. (The phrases are from a poem by Robert Graves.) The commission's hope, though, is that he and most readers will find the conversations constructive and valuable, and engagement in and with them fruitful. Journeys through the conversations will be worth undertaking, the hope is, even if the exact destinations and outcomes that are proposed or suggested in this report are not reached. That said, the conversations do all end up with specific and practical proposals and recommendations for ways forward.
- I.5 The commission was convened by the Woolf Institute, based in Cambridge. Established in 1998, the Institute promotes the multidisciplinary study of relationships between Christians, Jews and Muslims and engages in reflection on the practical implications for public policy of academic research and theory. On the basis of its teaching and public education programmes over some 15 years the Institute's trustees considered there is a great and urgent need for a deeper understanding of religion and belief in modern society and for the key issues to be reviewed holistically, not each on its own. If deeper understanding is not developed amongst policy-makers and in the public square more generally, there is a danger that policies and decisions will be insensitive and inadequate and that the public good will be severely damaged. Everyone will then be negatively affected, regardless of what their private views of religion and belief may be. The trustees were mindful that for these reasons the Runnymede commission on the future of multi-ethnic Britain, reporting some 12 years earlier, had recommended that 'a commission on the role of religion in the public life of a multi-faith society should be set up to make recommendations on legal and constitutional matters'.² Further, they appreciated that attention needs to be paid not only to the Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) but also to other world religions, particularly Hinduism and Sikhism, and to non-religious worldviews and philosophies such as humanism.

'a danger that policies and decisions will be insensitive and inadequate and that the public good will be severely damaged'

- I.6 With these various considerations in mind the Woolf Institute trustees resolved to set up a commission which would invite, sift and scrutinise evidence from a wide range of interests, including secular interests as well as religious, and which would offer reflections and recommendations for further debate. They invited Baroness Elizabeth Butler-Sloss to chair the commission and in consultation with her invited 20 further people to be members. Between them the members had a wide range of involvement in, and practical experience of, the issues to be examined, and were diverse in terms of age, gender, ethnicity and occupation, and in their religious, philosophical and political outlooks.
- I.7 They began by engaging in a substantial consultation exercise. They held six weekend meetings with visiting speakers, and public hearings were arranged in Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Leicester and London. A booklet was published and widely distributed and more than 200 substantial responses to this were received. There were many visits to, and interviews with, key individuals, projects and organisations. There was a special issue of the online magazine *Public Spirit*³ and a debate about the consultation in the House of Lords.⁴ It was from this mix of interactions and encounters, and from collective reflection on them, that this report was in due course distilled. There are fuller details in Appendix B.
- I.8 The pattern of the report is as follows. In the next chapter (chapter 2) there are notes on the key words in the commission's title, *religion* and *belief*, and the ways they are sometimes linked to issues of nationality and ethnicity. Sometimes, the notes recall, their meanings overlap and converge; sometimes they stand in mutual suspicion or hostility towards each other; sometimes there is synergy between them and a resulting synthesis.

The following chapter (chapter 3) outlines the commission's general approach to dealing with such matters. This includes a summary of its vision, which is of a society at ease with itself; a society in which individuals and communities feel at home as part of an ongoing national story; a society to which all its members wish to, and are encouraged to, contribute their energy, insights and wisdom to the common good. The next five conversations consider how the vision may be supported in education systems (chapter 4), through the print, broadcasting and social media (chapter 5), dialogue and engagement (chapter 6), social action (chapter 7) and civil and criminal law (chapter 8).

- I.9 Through all six conversations there is recognition of Britain's many strengths and achievements. 'There is much to be grateful for and proud of', wrote someone to us in response to a question we had asked about law, 'in the legal traditions of the United Kingdom'. Similar appreciation could be expressed about the other areas of society with which the report is concerned. At the same time the note of caution and against complacency which our correspondent struck about law can of course be struck too about all the other topics: 'But it is important to ask whether the law is doing all it can to help us live with our differences.'
- I.10 Living with difference is a recurring theme throughout the report, as also throughout the discussions and meetings which underlie the report. Moreover, living with difference was not only a topic for discussion at commission meetings but also, for those who were present, a constant and unavoidable experience. We had to consider differences between belief and religion, between and within different religious traditions and worldviews, and between different stories and personal backgrounds; we also considered different kinds of engagement with public, private and voluntary sectors of wider society as well as different political outlooks and sympathies. And there were of course differences of opinion and judgement about what should be done in terms of practical policy.

'living with difference was not only a topic for discussion at commission meetings but also, for those who were present, a constant and unavoidable experience'

- I.11 Should the Church of England be disestablished? Should the British Empire be largely celebrated or largely regretted? Should faith schools continue to exist, and if so should they be permitted to select pupils or staff according to religious background? Should there be a common framework for education about religion and belief throughout UK schools? Should the media be differently regulated and if so how? Is interreligious dialogue essential and if so how should it be facilitated and funded? How can religion and belief constituencies contribute, both locally and nationally, and both singly and collectively, to the common good? Have recent new laws on human rights and equalities been beneficial or should they be radically critiqued? Ought the legal concept of reasonable accommodation be introduced into UK legal systems? Do civil and criminal legal systems need to be reviewed to take into account the complex overlap between religion and ethnicity? These were some of the many questions on which members of the commission disagreed with each other. They did, however, agree that these are important questions to ask, important conversations to have, important journeys and directions to travel. And they did agree, as shown in the pages that follow, on many practical steps that need to be taken as a matter of priority, for the common good.

1 <http://www.corab.org.uk/>.

2 Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (2000), p. 311.

3 See Modood (2014), Milbank (2014), Davie (2014), Voas (2014), Taylor (2014), Bunglawala (2014), Reddie (2014), Kessler (2014).

4 House of Lords Debate (2014).

2. LANDSCAPE

Meanings and changes

- 2.1 The words *religion* and *belief* have in common that most people feel they know what they mean, what they refer to. The words are not technical jargon, and are not – so it is widely felt by common sense – problematic. The reality, though, is that they can have different meanings and nuances for different people in different contexts and at different times. A single initial example of ambiguity will suffice. ‘My husband’, said a character once in a *Punch* cartoon, ‘was imprisoned for his beliefs, particularly his belief he’d never get caught.’
- 2.2 This introductory chapter about religion and belief in modern Britain begins, then, with remarks and reflections about certain key phrases and words – first, the origins of the phrase *religion or belief* in several centuries of argument and dispute about freedom and rights, then each of the two keywords separately, *religion* and *belief*. It continues by considering the relationship between the two concepts and then by noting certain relevant changes in wider society that have been taking place in recent decades. The chapter’s overall purpose is to sketch the general *religion and belief landscape*, as the term might be, in which specific public policies – for example in law, education, welfare, the role and freedom of the media – will be considered in detail later in the report.

Confidence in my identity

I was born in 1972 and didn't hear the word "humanist" until I was in my early thirties. I was aware that I didn't believe the religious instruction I was given at my community primary school and Catholic secondary school, but I didn't have a name for what I did believe, and no way of identifying other people who held similar beliefs. Like many people, I was brought up to not mention the fact that I didn't believe in God, in case it offended someone who did. I wasn't encouraged to have confidence in my identity as a non-religious, critical thinker.

from evidence to the commission

Religion and belief

- 2.3 The phrases *religion and belief* and *religion or belief* were coined and developed in the international community, not in Britain alone, and backwards and forwards across a range of languages, not in English alone. They appeared in – amongst other places – the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the European Convention on Human Rights (1950) and the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and are enshrined in Britain through the Human Rights Act (1998) and the Equality Act (2010). They are the fruits of several centuries of argument and counter-argument, and sometimes of persecution, rebellion and open warfare. Britain has not been the only site of bitter argument and dispute over the years but events and thinking here have nevertheless been globally influential. There is now in Britain freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the right to manifest one’s religion or beliefs, as in many other countries throughout the world, and limitations to the expression of this right in a democratic society have been established. Religion or belief is in most respects on the same legal level as features and strands

of human difference such as age, disability, gender, race and sexual orientation, so that the law now sees it as no less important than – but also as no more important than – these other strands. In relation to religion or belief, as also to the other strands, the law requires public bodies of all kinds to have due regard for the need to eliminate discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations. There is further explanation of the new legislation in chapter 8.

- 2.4 The new legal status of religion and belief has been welcomed by many people. Also, though, it has been contested and regretted. 'It is very much the odd one out', observed someone in the consultation exercise which underlies much of this report, for unlike the others it has a contentious intellectual content and is therefore a matter of personal choice and decision, not given and determined by nature. It was pointed out that religions and beliefs make extensive and often mutually incompatible claims about the nature of life and about how to live, and that such claims can be legitimately appraised and argued over. There is no parallel, the argument ran, for the other strands. It is an argument that goes to the very heart of the basic concepts considered in this report and needs further examination and discussion. It appeals readily to common sense but is not in all respects accurate.

Religion

- 2.5 The notion that religion or belief is the odd one out amongst the protected characteristics in equalities legislation corresponds to the experience of people who consciously choose to be religious, or who consciously choose not to be. Most people reading this report probably see their approach to religion and belief as a consequence of their personal decision. However, it has always been the case, in Britain as throughout the world, that for some people, in certain locations and circumstances and at certain times and in certain respects, religion is not only a matter of personal deliberation, choice and commitment. Rather, it can be determined – partly, largely or even entirely – by the family and community into which a person is born, and by how they are perceived and treated by others. Over the centuries this has been particularly evident in the UK in relation to Catholics and Protestants, and in the ways membership of certain Protestant denominations was linked in the past to social class. It is still true in Northern Ireland and parts of Scotland that a person's religious affiliation may reflect their birth, family and community more than their personal deliberate choice, and that markers and badges of religious identity can include – for example – a person's first name and surname, and the name of the school they went to. Terms such as *cradle Catholic*, *ethnic Protestant* and *nominal Christian* refer to the ways in which a person's religious identity is not always a conscious choice on their part. So does the term *secular Jew*. More recently being a Hindu, a Muslim or a Sikh in Britain may similarly reflect a person's heritage and background as well as, and more than, their conscious choice. The term *ethno-religious* is sometimes used to capture the fact that ethnicity and religion can overlap and intertwine. A person's ethno-religious identity is not primarily to do with a system of religious beliefs which they may or may not embrace, or various religious practices they may or may not take part in, but with who their parents and family are and how they are perceived, approached and treated by others, regardless of their own wishes and preferences. They may regret and resist this, but there are limits to what they can do about it.

'religion is not only a matter of personal deliberation, choice and commitment'

- 2.6 The concept of ethno-religious identity is of increasing importance throughout the modern world, not only in Britain. It is particularly significant where there are conflicts of interest between different nations, communities and groups, for example to do with territory, recognition, esteem and resources. Conflicts can be not only racialised but also what is sometimes termed religionised, as people caught up in them seek to define and sharpen differences between 'us' and 'them', the self and the other, and to rally support for themselves.¹

- 2.7 Whether chosen or unchosen, religion can of course be an important component in someone's sense of identity and value, and in their personality, relationships and way of life. It can be a way of feeling connected to others, can give a sense of meaning and significance, can provide narratives, stories, symbols and teachings which impart moral guidance and inspiration, can build courage and resilience in times of trouble, can be a place of ceremony at times of celebration or grief, can articulate feelings of awe and reverence for the natural world, can inspire art, literature, music and architecture, and can motivate acts of kindness, compassion and generosity. For these reasons governments and public services have a legitimate and indeed necessary interest in religion, even though they may insist, in a famous phrase, that they 'don't do God'.² Religion can be a public good. At the same time, whether chosen or not, religion can be used as a justification for acts and behaviours which do substantial harm. It can support violence as a way of dealing with conflict, can legitimise structures and processes which limit the freedom and fulfilment of large numbers of people, and can be associated with lasting damage to the natural environment. It can be, in short, a public bad. For this reason too governments have a legitimate and indeed necessary interest in it.
- 2.8 Religion, to repeat, is not always and for everyone a matter of personal choice. It can be given and unchosen and in this respect it is similar to human characteristics such as ethnicity and gender. That is the first point. Religion has the potential to be both a public good and a public bad, and governments must have due regard for it. That is a second point. A third point is that religion exists in a changing landscape. Some of the most salient changes in modern Britain are itemised later in this opening chapter. First, there is a note about the other keyword which recurs throughout this report, *belief*.

'religion has the potential to be both a public good and a public bad, and governments must have due regard for it'

Belief

- 2.9 In international legal documentation the equivalent of the English phrase *religion and belief* is in French *la religion et les convictions*. The French word *convictions* has connotations of firmness, weight, intensity and commitment and refers to something which is fundamental in someone's sense of values, self-worth and identity. To count as a belief so far as the law is concerned, a point of view or *une conviction* must 'attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance, be worthy of respect in a democratic society and ... not incompatible with human dignity'.³
- 2.10 Belief in the sense of *les convictions* has close similarities with religion. It too can be affected by the milieu into which a person is born and in which they live, and not simply be a matter of personal choice. It too can be a way of feeling connected to others, can give a sense of meaning and significance, can be a source of narratives, stories, symbols and teachings which impart moral guidance and inspiration, can build courage and resilience in times of trouble, can be a place of ceremony at times of celebration or grief, and can motivate acts of kindness, compassion and generosity. For these reasons governments and public services have a legitimate and indeed necessary interest in belief. Belief as *conviction* can be a public good. At the same time, belief as *conviction* can be used as a justification for acts and behaviours which do substantial harm. It can support violence as a way of dealing with conflict, can legitimise structures and processes which limit the freedom and fulfilment of large numbers of people, and can be associated with lasting damage to the natural environment. It can be, in short, a public bad. For this reason too governments have a legitimate and indeed necessary interest in it.
- 2.11 The features of belief in the sense of *les convictions* are sometimes said to reflect ideas developed during the Enlightenment – the intellectual, cultural, moral and political climate which gathered strength in Europe and North America through the eighteenth century and whose legacy is seen in, amongst other places, equalities

legislation and human rights standards in the modern age. Enlightenment ideas included the use of reason and the advance of science; freethinking and toleration of dissent; the rights and responsibilities of individuals; independence and emancipation; deliberative and representative democracy; anticlericalism and humanism, and the separation of church and state; the rule of law as distinct from despotism and the arbitrary whim of officials; and the famed trinity of equality, liberty and solidarity. Enlightenment values, as summarised here, are also the values of humanism.⁴ Frequently Enlightenment values and *les convictions* have been in opposition to religion, and religion in its turn has been suspicious of, or downright hostile towards, humanism and *les convictions*. The two sets of values have also at times intertwined and converged, and have deeply influenced each other.⁵

‘Frequently Enlightenment values and ‘les convictions’ have been in opposition to religion, and religion in its turn has been suspicious of, or downright hostile towards, humanism and ‘les convictions’. The two sets of values have also at times intertwined and converged, and have deeply influenced each other.’

- 2.12 Of course, a particular belief can be held by someone *either* for religious reasons *or* for non-religious reasons *or* for both. (As religious people sometimes put it, there is both God’s law and natural law. It is not that something is right because God commands it; rather, God commands it because it is right.) ‘Religion’ and ‘belief’, it follows, sometimes overlap and coincide. Sometimes, however, there is a tension or contradiction between them and when this happens the dispute has to be managed or resolved. The relationship between religion and belief, or between religious values and Enlightenment values, is considered further in the next chapter and is implicit and fundamental in all the other chapters. They sometimes, to repeat, overlap; they are sometimes in mutual opposition; they sometimes combine, and mutually enrich and reinforce each other.⁶

Key features of current change

- 2.13 Three striking trends in recent decades have revolutionised the landscape on which religion and belief in Britain meet and interact. The first is the increase in the number of people with non-religious beliefs and identities. The second is the decline in Christian affiliation, belief and practice and within this decline a shift in Christian affiliation that has meant that Anglicans no longer comprise a majority of Christians. The third is the increase in the number of people who have a religious affiliation but who are not Christian. These three broad trends are illustrated in Figure 1, which is based on data pertaining to broad religious identity, not on the doctrines and tenets that people hold or do not hold, or the practices they do or do not take part in. Further, the data is based on people’s self-descriptions, not on how they are seen and approached by others. Figure 1 summarises 30 years of research by British Social Attitudes surveys, which take place every year in England, Scotland and Wales, but not in the whole of the UK. The summary shows the rise that has occurred in the proportion of people who state they have no religion – from just under a third in 1983 to almost a half in 2014. It shows also the decline in the proportion of those who describe themselves as Anglicans – from 40 per cent to about 17 per cent 30 years later. Further, it shows a slight decline in the proportions of Roman Catholics and a sharp increase, albeit from a low base, in the proportions who people who describe themselves as belonging to a religion but not as Christian.⁷

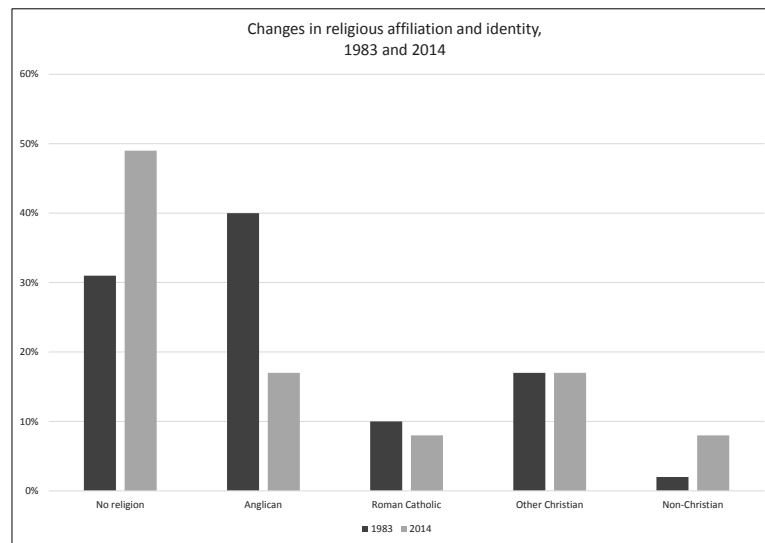


Figure 1: The British Social Attitudes Survey, administered by NatCen in 1983 and 2014, asked adults in England, Wales and Scotland about their religious affiliation. See NatCen (2015).

- 2.14 The same trends in relation to religious affiliation can be seen from comparing results from the 2011 census of population with the results from 2001. The censuses also permit comparisons to be made between patterns in different regions and nations.⁸ Broad affiliation and identity, however, is only one dimension of religion and belief. It is also relevant to consider ideas, doctrines, tenets and worldviews, and aspects of practice and expression. With regard to ideas, there are relevant data from a YouGov study conducted in 2013, in the Eurobarometer Study of Values and in the British Cohort Study. Figure 2 summarises the results of a YouGov study which asked people to describe themselves in relation to their values and beliefs. Almost half of the sample said they would not describe their beliefs and values as spiritual or religious; less than ten per cent described their values and beliefs as religious; about a quarter said they were spiritual but not religious or else spiritual and religious.⁹

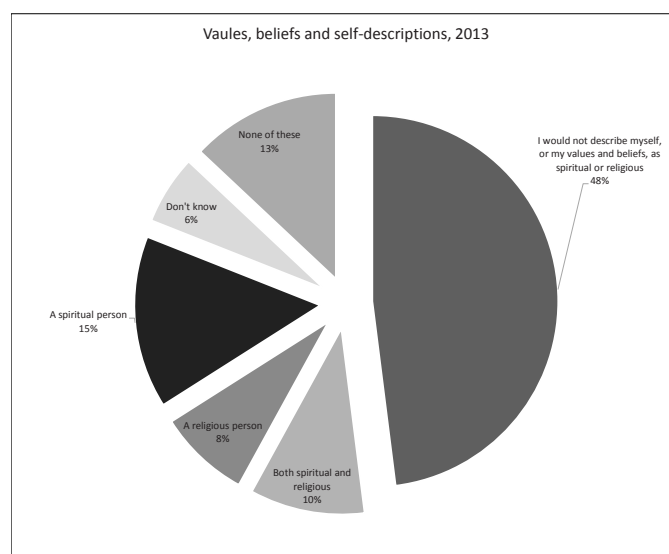


Figure 2: This 2013 YouGov / Westminster Faith Debates poll asked respondents, 'Which, if any, of the following describe you?' See Westminster Faith Debates (2013b).

- 2.15 Figure 3 summarises priorities amongst different social values and clearly shows a preference for Enlightenment values and humanism, as these terms were used earlier in this chapter. The four values prioritised by over 25 per cent of the sample were respect for human life, human rights, peace and equality. Less than ten per cent prioritised religion.¹⁰

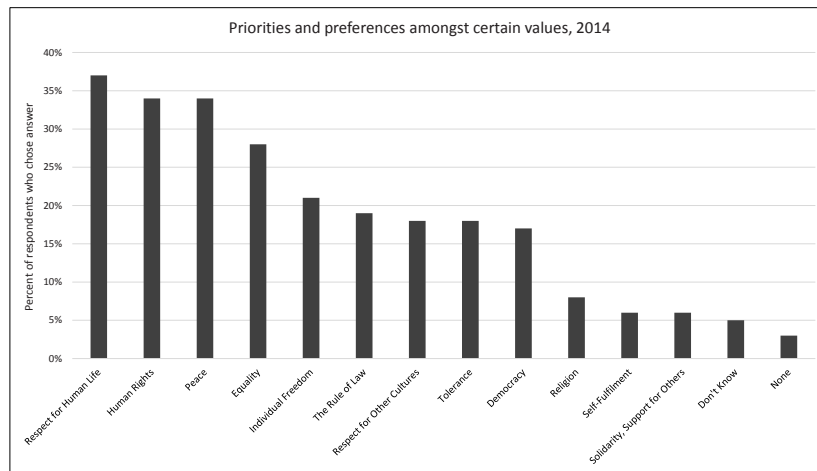


Figure 3: In this Eurobarometer Poll, respondents were asked, 'In the following list, which are the three most important values for you personally?' The data above from 2014 reflects answers given by UK respondents. See European Commission (2014), pp. 182–3.

- 2.16 Figure 4 shows estimates from the British Cohort Study about the prevalence of certain ideas about God held by people aged 42 in 2012. Just over 40 per cent of those questioned said 'I don't believe in God' or 'I don't know whether there is a God and I don't believe there is a way to find out'. This illustrates the first of the three social trends being considered here, the rise in the number of people who do not have a religion. Three other outlooks considered in the survey reflected various levels and forms of uncertainty and doubt. Only 13 per cent affirmed the view that would have been held by a high proportion of people in earlier centuries: 'I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it'.¹¹

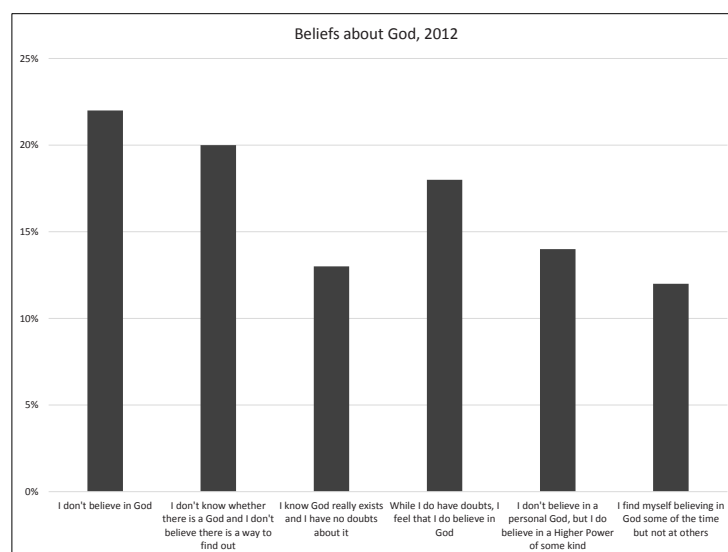


Figure 4: The British Cohort Study regularly surveys specific individuals born in the same week in 1970. In 2012 they were asked 'Do you believe in God?' See Sullivan, Voas and Brown (2014), p. 17.

- 2.17 Other surveys suggest that 56 per cent of the population never attend a place of worship¹² and that non-religious humanistic beliefs are widespread – for example, three fifths believe that ‘scientific and other evidence provides the best way to understand the universe’ as against a fifth who believe that ‘religious beliefs are needed for a complete understanding of the universe’.¹³ Of the proportion of people who define themselves as belonging to the Church of England, many do not have traditional Christian beliefs – only 48 per cent of those who ticked ‘Christian’ in the 2011 Census, for example, said they believed that Jesus was ‘a real person who died and came back to life and was the son of God’.¹⁴ The number of members of Anglican churches in the UK fell from 1.44 million in 2008 to 1.36 million in 2013; the number of members of Roman Catholic churches fell from 1.61 million to 1.40 million. Conversely, the total number of Pentecostal churches in the UK increased from 3,417 in 2008 to 4,055 in 2013, and the number of members rose from 358,000 to 433,000 in the same period. The number of members of Orthodox churches also rose due to migration from Eastern Europe, from 391 thousand to 464 thousand.¹⁵
- 2.18 The significance of religions other than Christianity for this report is out of proportion to the relatively small percentage of their members (less than ten per cent even when all added together) in the country’s total population. This is due to a combination of factors, including the following. One, the decline of the proportion of practising Christians in the total population means that the increase in members of other religions is more evident. Two, the age-structure in minority religious communities is different from the age-structure in the majority population: the proportion of younger people is much higher and the size of minority communities is therefore bound to grow, both relatively and absolutely. Three, for many members of other religions observance of their religion is seen (literally, seen) in the way they dress when in public places and at work. The observance of their religion (its manifestation, according to the legal term) also affects matters of diet, holidays, health and education. In circumstances of uncertainty and anxiety in wider society about national identity and cohesion, and about security and safety, this may be perceived by others to be inappropriately assertive and therefore confrontational and destabilising. Four, there is the impact of the phenomena known collectively though loosely as globalisation – the increasing interdependence of the modern world which has been, and is being, caused and reinforced by changing dynamics and interactions in economic, financial, industrial, political, military, cultural and intellectual systems, and in ecology and the global climate. It is increasingly the case, to adapt the famous words of John Donne, that no country is an island, entire of itself. The resulting uncertainties and consequent anxieties are an inescapable feature of the new religion and belief landscape.

‘the decline of the proportion of practising Christians in the total population means that the increase in members of other religions is more evident’

Concluding note

- 2.19 The changes described in the preceding paragraphs have been rapid and have accelerated in the last two decades. There are, of course, variations between the UK’s four nations. The decline in Christianity and the increase of the non-religious is more marked in Scotland and Wales than in England, and less marked in Northern Ireland, and the increase in non-Christian religions is more marked in the cities of England than in those of other nations. It must also be recognised that there are controversies amongst specialists about the methodologies of the surveys referred to in this chapter; and about the validity and interpretation of the results. Nonetheless, as trends, the three types of demographic and cultural change outlined in this chapter

One did not talk about religion

Whatever may have been the case in the bad old days before the Enlightenment, generations of the British have been brought up in the tradition that one did not talk about religion. In my university you were challenged to an unpleasant feat of drinking if you broke that taboo at dinner.

from a presentation to the commission

are robust and of long standing, and show no sign of abating in the near future. The increase in those with non-religious beliefs, the reduction in the number of Christians and an increase in their diversity, and the increase in the number of people identifying with non-Christian religions: these are the settled social context of Britain today and for the foreseeable future, as is the unsettled and unsettling context of the international environment. They underlie and shape all the conversations considered in the main body of this report. The first conversation (chapter 3) is about vision and values.

- 1 See chapter 8 for further discussion of these issues in relation to law.
- 2 Alastair Campbell, during David Margolick's interview of Tony Blair in 2003. Margolick (2003).
- 3 See Edge and Vickers (2015), pp. 15–19.
- 4 Copson (2015).
- 5 Siedentop (2014).
- 6 For further discussion of the legal definitions of religion or belief, see Sandberg (2014), pp. 28–52.
- 7 NatCen (2015). See Figure 1.
- 8 For the 2011 censuses across the UK, see Figures A.1, A.3 and A.5 in Appendix A. It should be noted that the three censuses (England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) have slight differences in the phrasing of the question about religion or belief, and they offer different ranges of options that can be chosen.
- 9 Westminster Faith Debates (2013b). See Figure 2.
- 10 European Commission (2014), pp. 182–183. See Figure 3.
- 11 See the tabulation of data from the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) in Sullivan, Voas and Brown (2014), p. 17. See also Figure 4. Charles Taylor explores at length the transition from a time when it was almost impossible not to believe in God to one when, as he puts it, believing in God is simply one option among many. See Taylor (2007).
- 12 Park et al (2012), p. 180.
- 13 Ipsos MORI (2007).
- 14 British Humanist Association (2011).
- 15 Brierley (2014), sections 1.2–1.3. Brierley's research is based on the self-reporting of membership by individual Christian denominations. Estimates are provided for denominations that do not supply data in a particular year. For denominations without a concept of membership, church attenders are counted instead.

3. VISION

Standing at a crossroads

'We are standing at a crossroads. What kind of society do we want? Will we be tribal and separate from one another, or an integrated, inclusive, welcoming society?'

'The crucial questions facing religions in society today are not points of detail but matters of fundamental attitude – in particular, whether Britain is a country which is alert to how it came to be the place it is, and the role of faith in getting us to this point.'

From responses to the commission's consultation paper

Background and context

- 3.1 Our vision in this report is of a society at ease with itself in which all individuals, groups and communities feel at home, and in whose flourishing all wish to take part. In such a society all:
- feel a positive part of an ongoing national story
 - are treated with equal respect and concern by the law, the state and public authorities
 - know that their culture, religion and beliefs are embraced as part of a continuing process of mutual enrichment, and that their contributions to the texture of the nation's common life are valued
 - are free to express their beliefs and practise a religion, providing they do not constrict the rights and freedoms of others
 - are confident in helping to shape public policy
 - feel challenged to respond to the many manifest ills in wider society and in the world as a whole, and to contribute to the common good.
- 3.2 Of course, all such statements of vision are subject to objections and questioning. None of the big words and phrases in this one – 'positive', 'national story', 'respect', 'concern', 'enrichment', 'manifest ills', 'common good' – is free of obscurity or ambiguity. Few people could sign up unreservedly to such words and phrases without knowing how they are being used and what in practice they entail, or might entail. There could be, you suspect, devils in the detail. This chapter accordingly seeks to elucidate several of the key terms used in the statement above. In this way it seeks to establish a basis on which the ensuing chapters will rest. Its own background was sketched in the previous chapter – antithesis and synthesis over the centuries between 'religion' and 'belief', and facts and figures about trends and changes in the religion and belief landscape of contemporary Britain. The chapter's principal subheadings are the ongoing national story; the common good; religion and belief literacy; and custom, constitution and ceremony. These four themes overlap with each other, and discussion of each qualifies and complements discussion of each of the others. Each can be considered separately, however, as in the rest of this chapter:

Challenges and concerns

The ongoing national story

- 3.3 What it means to be British is not fixed and final. People in the past understood the concept differently from the way it is seen today. By the same token, people in the future will look back at the early twenty-first century understandings and note differences from their own. Adapting a famous aphorism, both the past and the future are foreign countries, they do things differently there. Yet also there are continuities. It was broadly between about 1700 and 1840 that English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh people began to see themselves and each other as British. The United Kingdom was seen as a Protestant nation, a bastion of liberty, the centre of a vast and growing empire, an island with a powerful navy. This self-understanding was contrasted with how France, for example, was seen.¹ In due course, and painfully for many people in Britain though not for all, the perception of the country as a single great entity had to change. Magna Britannia, with *unus rex, unus lex, unus grex* (one monarch, one legal system, one cohesive community) morphed into something rather more various, and is morphing still.

Another villager

My dream as a Hindu has always been to live in a small English village as another villager. To work hard, to be a good father, to be a good and active citizen, to go the local church to celebrate the Almighty in his glory, to be a good neighbour and, yes, to have a couple of pints of warm beer on the way home. Why a dream? Will the village accept me for what I am?

from evidence to the commission

- 3.4 For example, in two of the four constituents of the United Kingdom a large minority of citizens would currently like to leave the union. In Scotland almost 45 per cent voted for independence in the 2014 referendum, and a recent survey showed that 25 per cent of Northern Ireland's voters support unity with the Republic of Ireland within the next twenty years.² This presents significant political challenges which require respect and understanding between people with different constitutional convictions and religious histories. That said, the desire to remain in the United Kingdom and the desire to remain British are not, of course, the same thing. In Scotland, in particular, many of those who want an independent state nonetheless embrace a British level of identity alongside a Scottish level and a European level. Whatever the long-term constitutional settlement, Britishness will continue to be a quality shared by many Scots and Northern Irish people, as also by many people in England and Wales. Bonds of mutual affection, and of family, culture and history, are at least as important as arrangements for governance in forming and sustaining British identity. It can be expected that religion and belief will play a part in nurturing and sustaining these, as they have in the past, even though the exact form this will take cannot yet be discerned.³
- 3.5 In any case the past is not entirely a foreign country, since – as has been said – the past is not dead and gone, it is not even past. This was vividly emphasised by a correspondent in our consultation exercise who suggested that the built environment of a modern town or city may be seen as a metaphor for the cultural, social and legal environment of the nation as a whole. 'I like to think of the public square,' he wrote, 'as the centre of a small town with a place of worship (for example, church, synagogue, mosque or temple) on one side, a place of education (school or college or library) on another, a courthouse and/or town hall (perhaps combined in a guildhall) on a third, and a pavilion or arena for sport or music or theatre on the fourth.' These buildings stand for the collective legacy of the past, he stressed, not for an assortment of separate legacies. There has always been traffic amongst them, a pattern of comings and goings independent of the state, and there continues to

be. It is essentially in the public square they have in common and in which they engage with each other; not inside any one of them, that the ongoing national story unfolds. All people have parts to play. 'Every time we look around the public square,' our correspondent urged, 'the institutions which surround it should remind us of the need to contribute multi-laterally to these overlapping spheres of community life, for the common good. The city's public space is shaped by all of this and each part of the city needs to interact with the others.'

- 3.6 Interaction in the public space of each city, town or village has taken place, and continues to take place, within a wider national and international context. It has been marked, and continues to be marked, by civility and harmony but also by difference, debate and disagreement. With particular regard to religion and belief, Protestantism was predominant in Britain and a significant facet of British identity from the Reformation in the sixteenth century onwards, but has been increasingly diverse and plural, since it has included Anglicanism and Presbyterianism, as well as a wide range of other Christian traditions. The British religion and belief story has also, though, contained the exclusion, marginalisation, harassment and at times persecution of religious, dissenting and atheist minorities. Those affected have included Catholics, Jews, Roma and pagans, and more recently Bahá'ís, Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Muslims, Rastafarians, Sikhs and Zoroastrians. Anglicanism is nevertheless, it has been said, a failed monopoly, the other side of a coin which has seen not only much struggle and suffering but also the British national narrative becoming more inclusive. Protestants who were not members of the Church of England, and then also in due course Catholics, Hindus, humanists, Jews, Muslims and Sikhs, have taken their place in public life. The present interplay between religious faith on the one hand and the humanism of the Enlightenment on the other is a specific achievement that has been worked out over a long time, and with great difficulty.

'the present interplay between religious faith on the one hand and the humanism of the Enlightenment on the other is a specific achievement that has been worked out over a long time, and with great difficulty'

- 3.7 Internationally, the Empire contributed hugely to Britain's sense of itself and of the world, and to the British war effort in the twentieth century's two world wars. The countries now known as Bangladesh, India and Pakistan, for example, contributed about 1.3 million personnel during WWI and over 2 million in WW2, a very high proportion of whom were practising Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs.⁴ Similarly many people from the Caribbean and African countries came to labour and fight in the wars. In due course, as recalled in the previous chapter, processes of migration to Britain from elsewhere in the Empire, beginning symbolically with the arrival of SS *Windrush* in London in June 1948, would bring Christians from Africa and the Caribbean to Britain's changing religious landscape, as also in ensuing years Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs from South Asia.
- 3.8 An inclusive narrative of Britishness was spectacularly demonstrated by the opening ceremony of the London Olympic Games in 2012. Three quarters of the population agreed in an opinion poll in August 2012 that 'the Olympics have shown Britain to be a confident, multi-ethnic society', and only seven per cent disagreed.⁵ It was not the ceremony alone, of course, which projected this self-understanding. Also the track and field events represented the UK as a unified but diverse nation. What the ceremony portrayed, essentially, was a multinational nation that was rooted but not stuck in the past, proud yet also self-deprecating, open to the future, open to the wider world, and concerned with the common good.

The common good

- 3.9 The term *common good* refers to public goods such as fresh air and clean water on which all depend. It also includes the availability for everyone of basic necessities – food, housing, health and education – which make it possible to live a meaningful human life. Further, and equally importantly, it includes the moral environment

or milieu on which society is as dependent as it is on the physical environment.⁶ Citizens are expected to pay taxes that may benefit others as well as themselves, and to delay their own demands in order that the more pressing demands of others may be met first. The National Health Service, the Olympics opening ceremony symbolically declared, is an icon of this moral milieu. The milieu is also characterised by the readiness of people to abide by certain rules of procedure, due process and deliberation that may not be in their own immediate best interests. They believe and trust that others will think and behave similarly, and there is an underlying assumption of warranted trust amongst society's members, and between citizens and representatives of the state. Contributing to the common good in its various senses is a responsibility of all citizens, regardless of their religious or non-religious worldview.

'contributing to the common good ... is a responsibility of all citizens, regardless of their religious or non-religious worldview'

- 3.10 In contemporary western society it is sometimes claimed there is no shared understanding of the common good; rather, each individual will have their own distinct ideas about this. What is shared is the rule of law, and providing people act lawfully, each individual should be free to make their own choices about the nature of the good life. This view of society as held together by law alone may be contrasted with one that is united by a common understanding of what life together is about.⁷ Before the Reformation Britain had a common goal provided by a widely shared understanding of the Christian faith maintained by the state. As is seen in the world today, the problem with societies based on this kind of shared understanding is that the scope for individual freedom can be non-existent or marginal, notably the freedom to practise a religion or ideology different from the one imposed by the state.
- 3.11 Some of those who contributed to our consultation exercise argued that since the seventeenth century European culture has been dominated and shaped by a highly individualistic view of what it is to be a human being. But humans are social beings, they stressed, and the view in many wisdom traditions is that people develop as individuals only in and through their relationships with others as part of communities. The idea of human dignity is a common denominator in public discourse in the West and is fundamental. It is seen rather differently, however, from the perspective of Eastern worldviews. Buddhists, Hindus and Jains, for example, consider the concept of human dignity to be too limited for balanced legal definition, and to reflect speciesism (the term has been coined on an analogy with terms such as racism and sexism) in environmental and social policy. They would prefer to consider the dignity of all living beings, not of human beings only, as the moral basis for decision-making and the rights of future generations not of the present generation only. Such intellectual stimuli and inputs need to be welcomed to the public debate, particularly of course in the global debate about the environment. Rethinking about humankind and the physical environment has also been cogently urged in 2015 in the papal encyclical *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*. 'Our common home,' the encyclical declares, 'is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us ... The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life.'⁸ This is not the only voice that needs to be heard in the global public square, of course, and not the only kind of poetic imagery and symbolism. But it is a striking example of the perspective that contributions from influential religious bodies to the global debate may contain.
- 3.12 Many leading thinkers have fiercely criticised the combination of social and market liberalism which now appears to drive western societies. They call for a much richer concept of the common good than that provided by individual freedoms and the forces of law alone. However important freedom of choice might be, it is not the only value, nor should it always be the overriding one. They propose a concept of the common good which recognises that human beings are characterised by interdependence, and that a shared social life confers on individuals civic responsibilities towards each other as much as personal rights. This means that values which encourage a sense of solidarity with others, and which strengthen a sense of shared responsibility

and accountability, and lead people to seek the good of the whole and not of an interest group, are fundamental to a society's health. People and institutions of all faiths and ethical traditions have an important role to play identifying and building on the values which form the moral environment of society which is, to repeat, as fundamental as the material one. Drawing on their own traditions of wisdom and practice people can look to what they share with others, contributing to and learning from them. In this way the moral texture of society can be strengthened in the direction sketched by the statement of vision with which this chapter began.

Turning point

I was brought up a Catholic in Glasgow in a community that was secure and stable but felt itself marginalised in a society which was definitely Presbyterian. Sectarianism was overt and obvious in all sorts of ways and as a young person I learned to change the name of my school so that it wasn't recognisable as Catholic. Many occupations were closed to Catholics and having stones thrown at me as I walked by Protestants on my way to the Catholic school was a regular occurrence. I never felt Scottish, nor did I have much affiliation with my roots, which were Irish. Like a lot of immigrants I was cultureless but knew myself to be on the margins and in a way disconnected from mainstream Scottish society. For me the turning point came with the Scottish Parliament ... I began to develop a sense of Scottish civic identity which allowed me to be Scottish without denying my cultural, religious or ethnic roots.

from evidence to the commission

- 3.13 With regard to the common good and society's moral environment, the government's emphasis on the active promotion of fundamental political values in English schools is to be welcomed.⁹ However, to imply that the values in question are distinctively British and not shared by many other countries, and that they need to be promoted in England but not the other constituent parts of the UK, risks fostering a partial understanding, at best, of British history and culture. A further serious problem is that to see these values primarily through the lens of counter-terrorism strategies has the unintended but harmful effect of making certain communities feel excluded from the national culture and story. This danger is considered further in chapter 8.
- 3.14 At a time when so much is dominated by the sole value of individual choice, faith leaders and other opinion leaders need to initiate discussions on the values, political and personal, they have in common with each other and with the humanist values of the Enlightenment. A national conversation should be launched across the UK by leaders of faith communities and opinion leaders in other ethical traditions to create a shared understanding of the fundamental values underlying public life. It would take place at all levels and in all regions. The outcome might well be, within the tradition of Magna Carta and other such declarations of rights over the centuries,¹⁰ a statement of principles to guide the development and evaluation of policies relating to the common good. At the very least it would be of practical and valuable relevance in the field of education. It could also, though, be useful in many other policy fields as well, and in any case the conversation itself would have many benefits.
- 3.15 Human beings, to repeat, are not isolated individuals but persons in community, and those communities, which Edmund Burke called the 'little platoons', are integral to the make-up of society. 'To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society,' declared Burke, 'is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind.'¹¹ Equal respect – a key phrase in the vision statement at the start of this chapter – does not

just mean toleration, in the sense of permitting. Rather, it involves the welcoming of difference and recognises the identities that are important to their bearers. It does not efface religious or humanist identities for, say, ethnic or national identities, nor is it blind to the inter-relationships between different dimensions of identity such as religion or belief and gender. It is an attitude that can co-exist with vigorous disagreement and debate provided it is conducted on the basis that all are fellow citizens and in a spirit of civility. Such equality of respect and concern is one of the marks of a society which recognises that the public square is rightly a crowded place where a wide range of voices, religious and non-religious, need to be heard. There is further substantial discussion of dialogue and engagement in chapter 6, and of the role and rule of law in chapter 8.

'human beings, to repeat, are not isolated individuals but persons in community'

Religion and belief literacy

- 3.16 Many respondents to our consultation document referred to what they called religious literacy. 'There is a need for both increased religious and media literacy,' someone wrote, 'to enable an informed and critical understanding of religious and belief communities. The increase in Islamophobia, antisemitism and a general negative stereotyping of religiosity are all serious phenomena that require urgent action if we are to be a fair and inclusive society.' In schools it was said that 'teachers and pupils know a bit about this or that religion ... but levels of religious literacy remain too low'. 'Religious literacy', someone else wrote, 'is an increasingly important aspect of preparedness for life in the modern world. Business, politics, science and the arts are all increasingly globalised and therefore inaccessible to those who cannot engage with the subtleties and nuances of the varied religious groups around the world. There is therefore both a moral and economic imperative to ensure that young people are equipped with religious literacy.' A senior figure at the BBC remarked that the British public has such 'poor religious literacy' that a modern audience would be baffled by the Monty Python film *The Life of Brian* because it would not understand the Biblical references: 'We have poor religious literacy in this country and we have to do something about it.'¹²
- 3.17 The term *religion and belief literacy* is arguably more inclusive and accurate than the shorter term *religious literacy*. Both terms, in any case, refer to a worldwide issue, not just a British one. Attention was drawn to an essay published in the United States: 'There remains a widespread illiteracy about religion that spans the globe. There are many consequences of this illiteracy, but the most urgent is that it fuels conflict and antagonisms and hinders cooperative endeavours in all arenas of human experience.'¹³ Religion and belief literacy has many facets, and these need to be considered and clarified in greater detail than there is space for here. Six of the most important facets, however, are outlined in the following paragraphs.
- 3.18 First, major religious and philosophical traditions and worldviews of humankind have many deep similarities, overlaps and commonalities. At the same time, however, there are significant differences between them. To cite a single example, it was pointed out in our consultation that non-Abrahamic faith systems are very little understood in the UK, and they are 'forever compared to the Abrahamic faiths in order to make them easier to comprehend'.¹⁴ For example, a correspondent said, 'Sikhs do not necessarily believe in a distinct God figure and the supreme being in the faith, Waheguru, is genderless. However, the translations of the Sikh scriptures, which have their origins in research carried out on the Sikh faith as part of the British Raj in the 19th century, refer to Waheguru as "God" and have attributed a male gender to all references to Waheguru even when there is no gender specific reference. This imposition of an Abrahamic viewpoint on the Sikh faith ... is a disservice to the spiritual and Dharmic origins of the faith.'

- 3.19 Second, there are significant differences *within* each religious tradition, for no tradition is monolithic, none is unchanging and none exists independently of specific cultural, historical and political contexts and circumstances. Within Christianity internal differences include Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant; within Hinduism they include Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism; and within British and South Asian Islam they include Barelwis and Deobandis. Cutting across fundamental distinctions such as these there are frequently tensions between tradition and reform, and between the perspectives and experiences of women and men; different approaches to the interpretation of sacred texts, for example the extent to which texts can and should be understood entirely literally; different views of personal morality and political priorities; and differences between those who are observant and those who are not. Disputes and differences which may appear at first sight to have their origins in doctrine and practice are often related to conflicts around resources, territory, influence, power and recognition.

'no tradition is monolithic, none is unchanging and none exists independently of specific cultural, historical and political contexts and circumstances'

- 3.20 Third, for some people in some circumstances, as mentioned in the previous chapter, belonging or not belonging to a religion is to do with heritage and sense of identity more, or much more, than to do with holding certain beliefs or engaging in certain practices. Religious identity can therefore be bound up with ethnic or national identity, and is something given rather than chosen. The term 'ethno-religious' is in consequence frequently apposite, particularly when a community or group is a target for hostility, discrimination or exclusion motivated by antisemitism, sectarianism or Islamophobia.
- 3.21 Fourth, it is often vital to recall that, also as outlined in the previous chapter, a religion has three main dimensions that do not always overlap: a) affiliation and identity, b) practice and c) doctrine and ideas. 'Religion,' commented a journalist in autumn 2015, 'has maintained its hold on people for a reason. I saw that for myself when, like Jews all over the world, I fasted to mark Yom Kippur. For those 25 hours, the phone was off, the emails stopped and slowly I – and those with me – began to see things from a different, less urgent, more timeless perspective. I don't know if those around me had a conventional faith in a supernatural creator: I suspect most of us didn't and don't. But that's no bar to taking part. Over the years, conversations with Jews, Catholics and Muslims have taught me that when it comes to religion, belief is often optional. For many, it's about belonging and community, a matter of ethnic or familial solidarity rather than theological creed.'¹⁵
- 3.22 Fifth, the relationship between what someone believes and what they actually do is often difficult to unpick. Two people may have similar beliefs but perform different actions. Or they may perform similar actions but have different beliefs. Also it happens that human beings do not always know accurately why they did something and may be prone to self-deception and misunderstanding in the reasons they give for their actions and the explanations they offer regarding their motives and purposes. It is not unusual in this connection for human beings to maintain that their actions are justified by religious doctrines, and yet to be mistaken about their motivation, or about what the doctrines really require, or about both, even when they are sincere.
- 3.23 Sixth, it is possible to appreciate religious art, architecture, stories, poetry, music and theatre without necessarily sharing the beliefs which they express or assume. Similarly, all or most religious and philosophical traditions contain concepts, wisdom and teachings that can valuably challenge the strategies, policies and priorities of secular governments, both national and local, and which therefore merit a presence and a hearing in the public square.

Custom, constitution and ceremony

- 3.24 One of the legacies of the UK's national story, as outlined earlier in this chapter, is the existence of an established church in England and of a national church in Scotland. The Church of Ireland was disestablished in 1871 and the Church in Wales in 1920. Establishment is like a rope containing several different strands;¹⁶ some of the strands can be cut or loosened without the rope itself being severed. To take just three examples: the Church of England now has the freedom to order its own forms of worship; in practice it has the freedom to nominate those it wants as bishops; and the law against blasphemy, which was only ever a defence of Christianity as defined by the Church of England, has been abolished. These simple examples are reminders that the relationship of the Church of England to the state has changed and is changing, and could change further. The pluralist character of modern society should be reflected in national forums such as the House of Lords, so that they include a wider range of worldviews and religious traditions, and of Christian denominations other than the Church of England, as recommended by the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords.¹⁷

'the relationship of the Church of England to the state has changed and is changing, and could change further'

- 3.25 Every society has its own distinct character and sense of itself and needs customs, symbols and ceremonies which give public expression to how it sees itself. These frequently mark a historical event, for example remembrance of those who fought and died in its name, or the signing of a charter of rights, or the founding of a political union. Such events bring people together and affirm a commitment to the common good, reminding them of the historical depth of the ideals to which their society is committed and which are not, as yet, fully realised. They mark important events in the life of a country in much the same way that customs and ceremonies mark significant events in the life of an individual, or of a family or a community. Frequently they contain religious references and symbols, and one of the functions of this is to imbue the event with solemnity and import, and a sense of something sacred. As the religion and belief landscape in Britain changes in the ways outlined in the previous chapter, it is relevant to consider whether existing ceremonies and rituals adequately reflect and affirm the kind of country Britain has become and wishes to be.¹⁸
- 3.26 Civic events and the symbols associated with them, to repeat, are an important factor in expressing and building up a sense of belonging together. Such events are often rightly secular, but for others history has bequeathed the churches a leading role. In recent years they have increasingly sought to use this historic legacy in an inclusive manner. Leaders of other faiths have had a role in civic services, for example, and there is a Commonwealth Observance ceremony in Westminster Abbey each year with readings from a range of different scriptures. Major state occasions such as the funeral of Princess Diana and the observance in summer 2015 of the tenth anniversary of the 7/7 bombs in London took place within Christian buildings and with much religious symbolism. But they also contained imagery and symbolism which were not distinctively Christian and which enabled the occasions to resonate with a much larger proportion of the population than just those who are churchgoers.
- 3.27 In a speech in 2012, Her Majesty the Queen said of the Church of England that 'its role is not to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of other religions. Instead, the Church has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country. It certainly provides an identity and spiritual dimension for its own many adherents. But also, gently and assuredly, the Church of England has created an environment for other faith communities and indeed people of no faith to live freely.'¹⁹ The establishment of the Church of England and, in its different way, the Church of Scotland has helped the integration of non-Christian perspectives and wisdom into British

society and enables them to make their voice heard in the public sphere.²⁰ In an analogous way, Christian chaplains in the military, hospitals, universities and prisons have frequently acted as brokers and facilitators in the widening of chaplaincy arrangements for adherents of other faiths.²¹ Funding for chaplaincies in hospitals, prisons and higher education should be protected, but with equitable representation for those from non-Christian religious traditions and for those from humanist traditions.

- 3.28 It must be acknowledged that the Church of England is not universally perceived to have acted gently and generously towards those with non-religious beliefs. It has resisted the provision of humanist pastoral support for the non-religious in hospitals and prisons, for example; opposed legal recognition of humanist marriage ceremonies in England and Wales on the same basis as in Scotland; and opposed the inclusion of non-religious worldviews in the examinations system for English schools.

Ways forward

- 3.29 All the later conversations in this report end with recommendations for practical ways forward which aim to realise the vision outlined at the start of this chapter. They are concerned respectively with education, media, dialogue, social action and law. This preliminary conversation does not lend itself so readily to recommendations that are concrete and specific. The following general points have emerged, however, either explicitly or by implication, and are worthy of repetition and re-affirmation.

Shared values and the national story

- 3.30 A national conversation should be launched across the UK by leaders of faith communities and ethical traditions to create a shared understanding of the fundamental values underlying public life. It would take place at all levels and in all regions. The outcome might well be – in the tradition of Magna Carta and other such declarations of rights over the centuries – a statement of the principles and values which foster the common good, and should underpin and guide public life.

Religion and belief literacy

- 3.31 There is a widespread need for greater religion and belief literacy. Relevant educational and professional bodies should draw up syllabuses, courses, programmes and modules.

Ceremonies

- 3.32 All those responsible for national and civic events, whether in the public sphere or in church, including the Coronation, should ensure that the pluralist character of modern society is reflected.

Chaplaincy

- 3.33 Funding for chaplaincies in hospitals, prisons and higher education should be protected with equitable representation for those from non-Christian religious traditions and for those from humanist traditions.

House of Lords

- 3.34 The pluralist character of modern society should be reflected in national forums such as the House of Lords, so that they include a wider range of worldviews and religious traditions, and of Christian denominations other than the Church of England, as recommended by the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords.

- 1 Colley (2009); Davies (1999).
- 2 See <http://scotlandreferendum.info/>; Clarke (2014).
- 3 See Bradley (2007).
- 4 Khan (2015).
- 5 Jolley and Katwala (2012), p. 19.
- 6 The idea of the common good is a fundamental category of Catholic social teaching which came to prominence in the UK with a document issued by the Roman Catholic Bishops of England and Wales in 1996 prior to the general election in the following year. See, for example, Sagovsky and McGrail (2015).
- 7 For a penetrating critique of the thought of the main advocates of neoliberalism, see Plant (2010). For a critique of market liberalism from an explicitly Christian standpoint, see Longley (2015).
- 8 Pope Francis (2015).
- 9 The government has made the teaching of British values a fundamental part of its counter-extremism strategy and they are to be promoted within the framework of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in British schools. 'Fundamental British values' have been defined as including 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of those of different faiths and beliefs'. 'Extremism' has been defined as the 'vocal or active opposition' to these values. Home Office (2015), pp. 9, 26–27. For government guidance on promoting British values in maintained schools, see Department for Education (2014a).
- 10 For the significance of Magna Carta in the current context see, for example, Woolf (2006) and Klug, F. (2015).
- 11 Burke (2009).
- 12 Aaqil Ahmed, BBC Head of Religion and Ethics, quoted in Burrell (2013).
- 13 The Religious Literacy Project at Harvard Divinity School, <http://rlp.hds.harvard.edu/about>.
- 14 The broad distinction between Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) and Dharmic faiths (generally considered to include Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism) is widespread throughout the world in both academic and popular usage. It is open to a range of objections and criticisms, however, and is not universally accepted. Sikhism, for example, is considered a Dharmic religion by many Sikhs but not by all.
- 15 Freedland (2015).
- 16 The metaphor originates in the report of the Archbishops' Commission on Church and State, chaired by Professor Owen Chadwick, 1966–70. Chadwick (1970).
- 17 Wakeham (2000), pp. 150–159. A 2012 poll of 1,716 adults in Britain found that 58 per cent of Britons believed bishops should not sit and vote in the House of Lords. Sixty-five per cent said they thought bishops are out of touch with public opinion. YouGov (2012).
- 18 For a recent survey of public attitudes to the next coronation, see Spencer and Dixon (2015).
- 19 Her Majesty the Queen (2012).
- 20 Modood (1997); Woodhead (2013), p. 155.
- 21 For a recent study into the extent of chaplaincy and the roles of chaplains in the UK, see Ryan (2015).

4. EDUCATION

How we learn and think

'A religiously literate society is absolutely needed, and it can only be achieved by a root and branch reform of how we learn and think about religion and belief at school, at university, at work and in everyday life.'

'Ask the students themselves: "what do we need to know/do to live well together?" "What destroys community life?" "What personal contribution can I make to ensure that my school and wider community are better places?" I think it is worth a try!'

From responses to the commission's consultation paper

Background and context

- 4.1 If the place of religion and belief in British public life is to be better understood, and if a society that works for the common good is to be achieved, it is vital to give attention to what is taught and learnt about religion and belief in schools and universities, as also in adult education and systems of training, both formal and non-formal. The commission's consultation received a vast number of responses on these issues. How religion and belief intersect with the education systems across the UK – primary, secondary, tertiary, lifelong learning – could be the focus of an entire commission in its own right. Inevitably, therefore, we have had to be selective in this chapter. Our choice in this respect has been to focus primarily on education in schools, and within this on the curriculum area that currently deals with religion and belief across the nations of the UK. Our references to tertiary education, lifelong learning and professional development, and to other curricular areas, are in comparison rather brief.
- 4.2 There are four jurisdictions of publicly funded schooling in the UK. Each has developed within a distinct historical and cultural context; each has its own statutory requirements relating to religion and belief, and its own pattern of compliance and non-compliance with them. Also, each has its own inspectorate and examinations, its own mix of types of school and range of schools with a religious character and consequently its own mix of syllabuses; and each has its own terminology and associated acronyms and abbreviations – religious education; religious instruction; religious studies; religious and moral education; spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; worldviews, to name just a few. That said, *Religion, philosophy and ethics* is increasingly common.¹ Despite the diversity of titles and terms there are commonalities with regard to aims, values and principles, and also with regard to challenges, problems and disagreements.
- 4.3 **In England and Wales** key legal landmarks are the Education Acts dated 1870, 1944 and 1988. Before 1870 the education system had two main features relevant to the concerns of this chapter: a) there was no compulsion to attend school and b) virtually all schools were provided by religious organisations, particularly the Church of England, the Church in Wales and – though much less so – the Roman Catholic Church. The Elementary Education Act 1870 made education compulsory for all children up to the age of 13 and funding was from then on provided from the public purse. The 1944 Education Act established the dual system of county (now community) and voluntary church (now faith) schools that basically still exists.² It is still the case

that about two thirds of all schools in England have no religious character and one third are faith schools.³ Taxpayers pay for the running costs of all state schools whatever their status, and most capital costs.⁴ The 1988 Education Reform Act is discussed in 4.5.

- 4.4 The vast majority of faith schools are Christian in character.⁵ Until recently most state-funded faith schools in England and Wales were either 'voluntary controlled' or 'voluntary aided'. In voluntary controlled schools, a foundation or trust (usually a Christian organisation) owns the land and buildings and appoints about a quarter of the governors, but the local authority responsible for education appoints the rest of the governing body, governs admissions and employs teachers; up to a fifth of teachers can be selected on the basis of religion. In voluntary aided schools, a sponsoring religious group owns the land and buildings and appoints a majority of the governors, and the governors act as the admissions authority and employ teachers, all of whom can be required to be religious. 1998 saw the introduction of 'foundation' schools, which are like voluntary aided schools with regard to their governance and admission arrangements, but like voluntary controlled schools in other relevant regards.⁶ 2002 saw the introduction of academies (state-funded independent schools), which were greatly expanded in scope in 2010 when existing schools were allowed to convert to academy status and 'free' schools were introduced. Academies and free schools are like voluntary aided schools in terms of admissions and teacher employment policies, unless they have converted from being voluntary controlled or foundation status, in which case they carry across most of the restrictions of those types of school. However, they also have additional freedoms of their own, such as not having to follow the national curriculum, and not having to employ teachers who hold qualified teacher status (QTS). Further, academies and free schools are, uniquely, able to maintain a religious ethos without this being formally designated.⁷

Have often thought

I have often thought wouldn't it be great if one day a child said to me "I know why you have long hair – you are a Sikh". I will then be living in a Britain which has evolved into a mature multi-ethnic society where children and teachers (and maybe wider society) have developed multicultural literacy and confidence. This can only happen through education – teacher education and in schools.

from evidence to the commission

- 4.5 The 1944 Act required that the syllabus for education about religion and belief in county schools should be agreed locally by relevant interested parties, with biblical content being a common denominator across Christian differences. An underlying assumption in the new syllabuses which were agreed from 1944 onwards was that all children in England and Wales were of Christian heritage, and that all teachers of education about religion and belief were practising Christians. The purpose was to nurture children in the faith of their parents. In much of the documentation the routine reference to Jesus was to 'Our Lord'. The 1988 Education Reform Act continued the requirement that education about religion and belief should be compulsory, but defined it as a component in the 'basic curriculum', as the term was, not the national curriculum. It also required that in schools without a religious character attention should be given to all the principal religions of the UK, not Christianity only.⁸
- 4.6 **In Wales** education policy has increasingly diverged from England in recent years, driven by the devolution of education matters since 2007, and to an extent by differences of political outlook and in approaches to funding. Within this context the Church in Wales and the Roman Catholic Church together provide around 12 per cent of the school places.⁹ A recent major review has emphasised the need for high-quality RE (to be renamed Religion, Philosophy and Ethics)¹⁰ to prepare young people in Wales for life in a pluralist world where religion and belief play a major role in the lives of many, and to help build an inclusive and tolerant society.¹¹

- 4.7 **In Northern Ireland** schools remain significantly divided, and one of the key factors relates to the place of religion in the curriculum and in schools more generally. About half of the schools in the province are Catholic schools – most of these are ‘maintained’ schools which are almost all fully funded, but not owned, by the state. ‘Controlled’ schools – which are both owned and run by the state – are largely *de facto* Protestant. As of 2015, about seven per cent of children attend mixed or integrated schools.¹² In this system, however, even those who do not wish to be educated separately have little choice; intentionally or otherwise, very few pupils experience any of their learning, including RE, in the company of children from a tradition other than their own. There is evidence that many would prefer an integrated system – or at least one that is much more cohesive – as a significant means of moving towards an aspired shared future.¹³ Beyond the Catholic-Protestant divide, the small but growing numbers of children and young people from other cultural and religious backgrounds are not well served by a Churches-devised RE core syllabus that positions itself as having an essential Christian character: RE in Catholic schools is denominational in nature, the emphasis being on faith formation. In controlled schools it must be non-denominational and is usually largely focused on Biblical material. In integrated schools it is a mixture of both, because Catholic parents still expect their children’s sacramental preparation to take place in primary schools. In consequence, Catholics and Protestants are moving in rather different educational directions when it comes to religious awareness and understanding. World religions had no formal place in the core syllabus until 2007, and even now study of them is only available for Key Stage 3 pupils, on the basis of the Churches’ argument that younger children would be confused. Another complicating factor is that the education and training inspectorate has no rights of inspection of RE in controlled schools unless specifically requested by a board of governors, which happens only infrequently.¹⁴

‘in consequence, Catholics and Protestants are moving in rather different educational directions when it comes to religious awareness and understanding’

- 4.8 **Scotland** has many similarities with the other three nations, particularly England and Wales, but also significant differences. The similarities include the fact that education about religion and belief is compulsory and that the history of relevant legislation corresponds to the history in England and Wales almost exactly – the key laws came onto the statute book in 1872, 1945 and from 1993 onwards. But in Scotland the subject now forms part of the curriculum structure shared across non-denominational and religious schools, although it is known in non-denominational schools as religious and moral education (RME), not religious education. This is taken from the title of an influential report published in 1992,¹⁵ and also reflects the religion and belief landscape in Scotland, and Scottish history and self-understanding.¹⁶ Catholic schools retain the phrase ‘religious education’ and have distinctive learning intentions for students within the curriculum structure.¹⁷
- 4.9 In all four jurisdictions there have been projects and developments over the years which are clearly relevant to teaching and learning about religion and belief but outside the framework of religious education. They include education for mutual understanding (EMU) projects in Northern Ireland and citizenship and community cohesion projects in England. More recently in England they include a focus on promoting the concept of fundamental British values (FBV) within the framework of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC).¹⁸ More generally, the Equality Act requirement that all schools in Great Britain should have due regard for the need to foster good relations between people of different backgrounds is clearly relevant to religion and belief issues, and has the potential to bring coherence and shared terminology into an otherwise fragmented picture. So far, however, this potential within education policy has not been adequately explored and does not appear to be on the active agenda of any of the jurisdictions in question.

Challenges and concerns

Admissions policies

- 4.10 As mentioned above, this chapter is primarily about the curriculum area in schools that deals with religion and belief. But first, we consider briefly the admissions and employment policies of faith schools, known also as schools with a religious character. Separation along religious lines within the publicly funded education systems of the UK is the legacy of history and clearly it is more pronounced in Northern Ireland than in other parts of the UK. Only in England, however, has it been increasing in the past decade, particularly as a result of government policy to increase the number of academies and religious schools.¹⁹ The perceived benefits of publicly funded religious schools for those who want to provide or attend them are clear. They enable churches and other faith communities to contribute their wisdom and experience to the common good, and enable religious parents to have their children raised in a religious ethos at state expense. On the other hand, there are many and increasing numbers of parents in England who do not want to send their children to a religious school, but whose only choice of a state school locally is a religious one.²⁰ Under current government policies, this will become more common. In England successive governments have claimed in recent years that faith schools and free schools create and promote social inclusion which leads to cohesion and integration. However, in our view it is not clear that segregation of young people into faith schools has promoted greater cohesion or that it has not in fact been socially divisive and led rather to greater misunderstanding and tension.
- 4.11 Selection by religion segregates children not only according to religious heritage but also, frequently and in effect, by ethnicity and socio-economic background.²¹ This undermines equality of opportunity and incentivises parents to be insincere about their religious affiliation and practice. Public opinion is divided but certainly many people in the UK, including many from a position of devout faith, are opposed to religious selection in pupil admissions, both in principle and because of the practical consequences.²² Bodies responsible for school admissions should take measures to reduce selection on grounds of religion in state-funded schools.

'bodies responsible for school admissions should take measures to reduce selection on grounds of religion in state-funded schools'

- 4.12 Schools with a religious character are not only permitted to select pupils on the grounds of religion, but they are also exempt from aspects of employment legislation, in that they may use religion as a criterion when hiring staff. There are concerns about the extent of this privilege and about the justification for it.²³ Governments should ensure the practice of exemption is monitored effectively and the correct processes observed; whilst, if it is abused, the law should be changed to restrict its application further.

Syllabuses, teaching and worship

- 4.13 A range of problems and challenges were put to us in relation to schools beyond the question of segregation in admissions policies and four of these are considered below. Some of them are pressing in all four of the UK's nations, whereas others are primarily an issue in just one nation. Not all the matters referred to below are equally serious everywhere. With particular regard to issues in England, most of the problems mentioned below have been highlighted and documented by Ofsted and a range of major reviews.²⁴
- 4.14 First, the relevant curricula throughout the UK are extremely diverse. There are in theory 174 different agreed syllabuses in local authorities in England and Wales, a range of different syllabuses in different Anglican and Roman Catholic dioceses, and several thousand different syllabuses in academy schools, which are now a majority of secondary schools in England.²⁵ The diversity arguably reflects remarkable trust in, and respect for,

local decision-making. But also it implies a lack of diligence and concern, for it seems anomalous to have so many different syllabuses in different localities across the country. No other curriculum subject is treated in this way. On the contrary, the approach to religion and belief education in England is in distinct contrast to the way other subjects are regulated. In these only one programme of study is set for each subject, and although academies are free not to teach it, most do because of pressures applied by Ofsted inspections.

- 4.15 Second, the content of many syllabuses is inadequate. They fail to reflect the reality of religion and belief, having a rather sanitised or idealised form of religion as their content. They tend to portray religions only in a good light, focusing on the role of religions in encouraging peace, harmony, and caring for the poor and the environment; and they tend to omit the role of religions in reinforcing stereotypes and prejudice around issues such as gender, sexuality, ethnicity and race, and the attempts to use religion as a justification for terrorism. Further, a great many fail to include non-religious worldviews, for example humanism, and do not deal with competing truth claims. They do not, that is to say, deal with the full spectrum of religion and belief issues covered in this report. Experienced and knowledgeable teachers of education about religion and belief can usually overcome such weaknesses in written documents and achieve better teaching than the syllabus might itself suggest. Good teaching, where it exists, undoubtedly helps children and young people to learn both about religion and from it, and makes a powerful contribution to mutual understanding and cohesion.²⁶

'fail to reflect the reality of religion and belief, having a rather sanitised or idealised form of religion as their content'

- 4.16 Third, the shortage of well-trained teachers of education about religion and belief in England and Wales (in contrast to Scotland) means that shortcomings in official syllabuses are compounded in practice. Many primary school teachers are so poorly trained in relation to teaching about religion and belief that, whatever the curricula provided, the handling of the issues contained in them is extremely variable. Of the teachers who were questioned in a survey of over 300 primary schools, only 19 per cent reported receiving more than 11 hours of initial training devoted to religious education. In secondary schools, there are fewer specialist teachers of religion and belief education than for any other academic subject.²⁷ A massive recruitment and retraining programme for teachers of education about religion and belief is required if these matters are to be treated seriously and deeply in these unprecedented times of religious confusion and tension.
- 4.17 Fourth, there are still requirements on most schools across the UK to provide religious worship and for this to be Christian. The arguments in favour of retaining compulsory Christian worship in UK schools are no longer, however, convincing. There are arguments for total repeal,²⁸ but also there is widespread support for an alternative provision, as distinct from abolition. In this connection we applaud the joint initiative in Scotland between the Humanist Society Scotland and the Church of Scotland to work together for an inclusive 'time for reflection'.²⁹ The commission endorses this approach as an example for the rest of the UK and notes that it would build on the good practice of holding inclusive assemblies that already exists in many schools but remains technically unlawful.³⁰

Tertiary education and beyond

- 4.18 In further education colleges most curricula consist primarily of qualifications for work, whether academic or vocational. Apart from religious studies qualifications (A Level is virtually the only one for post-16 students) there is hardly any organised or discrete study of issues of religion and belief. A very small number of courses, for example childcare, sociology and similar subjects, may include the study of some aspects of religion. Despite the good work done in a few notable institutions, and by some chaplaincies supporting tutorial or other

guidance, issues of religion and belief rarely feature in the education or training of 16–19 year olds, just at an age when they are embarking on adult life and higher education or careers, and in a world in which such issues have a profile higher than ever before.

- 4.19 In universities two of the biggest problems put to us in our consultation were to do with a tendency to view issues of religion and belief through a lens of security and counter-terrorism, and a tendency to see modernity and science as intrinsically inimical to religion and belief. To an extent, these two tendencies complement and reinforce each other. With regard to the first of these, there is currently concern about the requirements of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 in relation to universities. 'Enabling free debate within the law,' wrote the Russell Group of universities, 'is a key function which universities perform in our democratic society. Imposing restrictions on non-violent extremism or radical views would risk limiting freedom of speech on campus and may potentially drive those with radical views off campus and underground, where ... [they] cannot be challenged in an open environment. Closing down challenge and debate could foster extremism and dissent ... The intention to include non-violent extremism within the scope of Prevent work in universities is a particular problem, as it conflicts with the obligation to protect free speech.'³¹ Further, universities are well placed to help the rest of society 'de-muddle' complex, controversial and sensitive issues, since they can provide space and scope for un-anxious conversations in which different and conflicting views and viewpoints can be respectfully and civilly examined. It is also relevant to note there are excellent models of multi-faith chaplaincy and worship areas in universities, as also in hospitals, and these too have implications for wider society.³²
- 4.20 Universities are places where many of the tensions in society around religion and belief are enacted, and for young people may well be where they encounter them for the first time. By the same token they are also places where young adults can learn approaches and practices that enable them to negotiate problematic issues skilfully throughout the rest of their lives. For example, contested areas between perceived religious and other rights, as seen in disputes over gender-segregated seating at events, foreshadow later conflicts in the workplace over the contested manifestation of religious beliefs at work. Meanwhile, competition over resources such as use of prayer rooms or chaplaincy provision can be opportunities to learn how to negotiate conflicts over funding resources between different religious groups. Universities thus can be places where the successful negotiation of crucial issues can be modelled and learned by young citizens. They can also be places where students and staff experience the formation of a strong, balanced confidence in their personal identity and beliefs as the foundation for respect for others and for diversity. Such spaces exist also in schools, it is important to recall, not just in universities. Free debate should be possible without fear of students being labelled as extremists or attracting the attention of the security services. That all said, universities will deal better with religion if they approach it as something that belongs to their intellectual discussions rather than as an external factor with which they have to cope.³³

'universities will deal better with religion if they approach it as something that belongs to their intellectual discussions rather than as an external factor with which they have to cope'

Continuing professional development

- 4.21 Beyond the world of education, those working in professions, especially those where direct contact with individuals is a routine part of their employment, should be trained in matters of religion or belief to ensure they have the knowledge to engage with the beneficiaries of their work with understanding. This crucial point is made in several other places in this report – in general terms in chapter 3 and with specific regard to the media in chapter 5 and legal systems in chapter 8.

Ways forward

- 4.22 In response to the challenges outlined above, several significant changes need to be made to improve education about religion and belief. The basic approach should be informed by human rights values and standards, as emphasised in recent years both by the Council of Europe and by the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE).³⁴ Both these bodies, incidentally, have drawn substantially from developments in the United Kingdom. Two of the many implications of this approach are that religious practices should not be required in publicly funded schools, but also that they should not be prohibited. Within a human rights framework, the aims for religion and belief education formulated by the Religious Education Council of England and Wales are a valuable basis for detailed planning.³⁵
- 4.23 As is the case in Scotland, a national entitlement of content and outcomes can be flexibly applied at the level of the individual school. Such an approach seems far superior to the current approach in England and Wales where the variety of school, diocesan and local authority syllabuses, but with no underlying and unifying framework, creates a range of problems.
- 4.24 Education about religion and belief is essential because it is in schools and colleges that there is the best and earliest chance of breaking down ignorance and developing individuals who will be receptive of the other, and ask difficult questions without fear of offending. This is vital for the fruition of our vision for a fairer, more cohesive society, as set out in chapter 3. Education about religion and belief must reflect not only the heritage of the UK, with its religious and non-religious traditions, but also the realities of present society. Crucially, it must take account of the ongoing social changes in religion and belief that were outlined at the start of this report. If the curriculum is objective, fair and balanced, and does not contain elements of confessional instruction or indoctrination, then this teaching should be required in all schools and there is no reason for a legal right to withdraw from learning about religion and belief.

‘education about religion and belief is essential because it is in schools and colleges that we have the best and earliest chance of breaking down ignorance and developing individuals who will be receptive of the other, and ask difficult questions without fear of offending’

- 4.25 A key element of any effective work designed to improve learning about religion and belief must be encounter. At the basic level this means that participants in the teaching and learning process must at the very least be able to meet people different from themselves in terms of background, heritage and worldview. Quality encounter, however, must go beyond just knowing about different religions and beliefs, and engage participants in an interactive process of building relationships based on awareness, honesty, dialogue and trust. There is further and fuller consideration of encounter and real dialogue in chapter 6 of this report. In many schools simple encounter can be taken for granted – classes are mixed in several kinds of ways and encounter is inbuilt, though of course there still needs to be continuity and skilled teaching to make the most of interaction and exchange. But when schools are separate, whether by design or default, the encounters and exchanges of learning from and through difference are much harder to create. Visits outside the classroom and visits to schools by suitable trained volunteers can, however, perform a useful function here.
- 4.26 Encounter is no less crucial for teachers. It is hard for them to model the qualities of intercultural understanding with their pupils if they too lack the opportunities for learning from encounter with difference. Cross-community contact programmes have played a significant role in attempting to offset the worst effects of separate schooling in Northern Ireland, and there is an increasing use of similar inter-school encounter programmes

in other parts of the UK, some of them originating from discussions with Northern Ireland educators. The experience in Northern Ireland has been that such programmes are effective when they form part of a long-term commitment, are grounded in the curriculum and do not shirk tackling controversial issues. Short-term projects or those based on purely social activities may prove to be superficial and ineffective, or even counter-productive. Although there is a cost in terms of finance and human energy, learning about religions and beliefs presents excellent opportunities for good-quality inter-school work. The professional preparation of teachers, pre-service and in-service, must take this very seriously.

4.27 It follows from the discussions in this chapter that governments across the UK should introduce a statutory entitlement for all schools within the state system for a subject dealing with religious and non-religious worldviews.³⁶ They should establish content and learning objectives that can be flexibly applied by teachers, allowing the minimum requirements to be built on differently by different schools. The content should be broad and inclusive in a way that reflects the diversity of religion and belief in the UK, and the subject should have the same status as other humanities subjects. In the different nations of the UK this would require different measures, most notably:

- **In England** the current non-statutory curriculum framework produced in 2013 by the Religious Education Council (REC) should be made statutory as part of the national curriculum, but under a modified subject name, pending future reform. Consideration should be given to making it a humanities subject within the English Baccalaureate.
- **In Northern Ireland** the present subject of RE should be renamed and broadened to include more religions and non-religious worldviews on the same basis as religions. It should be given an explicitly educational rather than confessional focus, and applied to all state-funded schools.
- **In Scotland** the current Curriculum for Excellence area of religious and moral education (RME) should be extended under a modified name to include non-religious worldviews on the same basis as religions and applied to denominational as well as non-denominational schools.
- **In Wales** the present curriculum review offers an opportunity to introduce a new subject with content similar to that of the REC framework for England to replace the exemplar framework for RE and local determination, and be applied to religious as well as community schools. At the time of writing it appears that the Welsh Government is indeed moving in this direction.

Genuine opportunities

As a Christian it was important for me that both my children were educated in church schools as I wanted them to be educated in settings where matters of faith and belief were taken seriously and genuine opportunities for spiritual development and education existed.

from evidence to the commission

4.28 These four sets of developments should operate in collaboration with each other, and with as much consistency and mutual influence as can be achieved. Consideration should also be given to including the Republic of Ireland in the collaboration, and to taking account of developments internationally, particularly those which take place under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and UNESCO. Governments across the UK should in addition:

- repeal requirements for schools to hold acts of collective worship or religious observance and issue new guidelines building on current best practice for inclusive assemblies and times for reflection that draw upon a range of sources, that are appropriate for pupils and staff of all religions and beliefs, and that will contribute to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

- recognise the negative practical consequences of selection by religion in schools, and that most religious schools can further their aims without selecting on grounds of religion in their admissions and employment practices; require bodies responsible for school admissions and the employment of staff to take measures to reduce such selection
- expect publicly funded schools to be open for the provision of religion- or belief-specific teaching and worship on the school premises outside of the timetable for those who request it and wish to participate; this would be in line with the autonomy of young people and their human right to freedom of religion or belief
- require state inspectorates to be concerned with every aspect of the life of faith schools, including religious elements currently inspected by denominational authorities
- ensure that in all teacher education attention is given to religion and belief that is of a similar level to that which is given to reading and maths, so that every primary class teacher is confident and competent in this curriculum area, whether implicit or explicit, and so that in secondary and further education teaching all staff have general awareness of relevant sensitivities
- clarify and emphasise that in all phases and sectors of the education system respectful and thoughtful discussion of contrasting opinions and worldviews is essential, and that all staff have skills in the educative handling of sensitive and controversial issues.

4.29 In the light of the public sector equality duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) the Equality and Human Rights Commission, or else a similar body, should produce best practice guidelines on matters of religion and belief in the initial training and continuing professional development of staff employed in higher education; and in professions such as law, medicine, nursing and social work; and in government and public administration.

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- 1 Note the move towards this title in Wales, as indicated by Huw Lewis, Minister for Education and Skills. National Assembly for Wales (2015).
 - 2 Gates and Jackson (2014), p. 68.
 - 3 Among state-funded schools in England, 37 per cent of primary and 19 per cent of secondary schools have a designated religious character (34 per cent in total). In Wales the figures are 16 per cent and 9 per cent respectively (15 per cent in total). Some academies have a religious ethos but are not formally designated as such. See Department for Education (2015), Welsh Government (2015). For a useful compilation of the data see British Humanist Association (2015a).
 - 4 The exception being 10 per cent of capital costs in the case of voluntary aided schools, which is instead contributed by the religious authority.
 - 5 Among state-funded faith schools in England, 99 per cent of primary and 98 per cent of secondary schools are Christian in character. All faith-based primary and secondary schools in Wales are Christian in character. See Department for Education (2015), Welsh Government (2015).
 - 6 The foundation usually appoints about a quarter of the governors but in some cases it appoints the majority. The governing body or a charitable foundation owns the land and buildings. National Secular Society (n.d.).
 - 7 For overviews of different schools, see British Humanist Association (2015b) and National Secular Society (n.d.). See also Clarke and Woodhead (2015), pp. 18–19 and Department for Education (2014b), pp. 43–44.
 - 8 Dinham and Jackson (2012), pp. 280–281.
 - 9 British Humanist Association (2015a).
 - 10 See chapter 4: note 1.
 - 11 Donaldson (2015), pp. 46–47.
 - 12 Other schools, which are small in number, include Irish Medium schools, which are state-funded and are mainly supported by Catholic families. Department of Education [Northern Ireland] (2015), p. 18; Richardson (2014), pp. 207–208.
 - 13 The 2014 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey of 1,211 adults found that 59 per cent of respondents would prefer to send their children to a mixed religion school, compared with 34 per cent who would prefer a school of their 'own religion only'. Ark (2014).
 - 14 Inspection and examination rights for religious education in controlled schools are held by 'Ministers of religion and other suitable persons ... to whom the parents do not object'. See the Education and Libraries (Northern Ireland) Order (1986), s.21.7. In practice, formal inspections of religious education by clergy are increasingly rare, so in effect religious education in controlled schools falls outside of any kind of inspection regime. In Catholic schools religious education is regularly scrutinised by Diocesan Advisers and parish clergy. Richardson (2014).
 - 15 Scottish Office Education Department (1992).

- 16 See Figures A.5 and A.6 in Appendix A for details on the changing landscape of religion and belief in Scotland.
- 17 In September 2014, 14 per cent of schools open in Scotland were considered 'denominational', and almost all of these were Roman Catholic – see Scottish Government (2014). For an overview of RME / RE in A *Curriculum for Excellence*, see Education Scotland (2009a), (2009b) and Conroy (2014).
- 18 Home Office (2015), pp. 26–27; Department for Education (2014a).
- 19 See British Humanist Association (2015a).
- 20 For example, 49 per cent of rural primary schools are Church of England schools. In some rural areas this may mean that there is no alternative local provision for parents who would not wish to send their children to Church of England schools. See The Church of England's National Education Office (2014), p. 27 for the statistics on rural primary schools.
- 21 See, for example, Donald with Bennett and Leach (2012), pp. 162–167; Allen and West (2009); Cantle (2001); the data analysis on the Fair Admissions Campaign website, <http://fairadmissions.org.uk/map/>. See also the databank of evidence provided on the Accord Coalition, <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/research/>.
- 22 For example, in a 2012 survey of 2,008 British adults, 73 per cent of respondents agreed that 'state funded schools, including state funded faith schools, should not be allowed to select or discriminate against prospective pupils on religious grounds in their admissions policy', compared to 18 per cent who disagreed. In contrast, a 2013 survey of 4,018 British adults found that 49 per cent found it acceptable, and 38 per cent unacceptable, that 'Faith schools are allowed to give preference in admissions to children and families who profess or practise the religion with which the school is affiliated'. See Accord Coalition (2012); Westminster Faith Debates (2013a).
- 23 Donald with Bennett and Leach (2012), pp. 167–168.
- 24 Ofsted (2010), (2013); Clarke and Woodhead (2015).
- 25 As of January 2015, academies constitute 61 per cent of state-funded secondary schools in England. Department for Education (2015).
- 26 Such issues are highlighted in Conroy et al (2013), pp. 220–226.
- 27 All Party Parliamentary Group on Religious Education (2013), pp. 13, 15–16.
- 28 See Clarke and Woodhead (2015), p. 27.
- 29 BBC (2014).
- 30 For discussion about possible options for the future of collective worship or religious observance, see Cumper and Mawhinney (2015).
- 31 Russell Group of Universities (2015), paras. 3.1–3.
- 32 For a recent study of chaplaincy in the UK, see Ryan (2015).
- 33 For further discussion of these issues, see Modood and Calhoun (2015).
- 34 See Jackson (2014) and Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (2013).
- 35 See Religious Education Council of England and Wales (2013), pp. 11–12.
- 36 This recommendation is also made by Clarke and Woodhead (2015).

5. MEDIA

Reporting and representation

'Clearly we can't roll back history and re-educate everyone, but we can improve the reporting and representation of religion by the media. The secular media often misreport, misrepresent and indeed belittle religion, thereby leading to a loss of freedom in society.'

'Religion is portrayed in the media as dangerous at worst and odd at best. There is an underlying assumption that secularism is the norm and an advance on religious belief... There is a general lack of religious literacy in the print and visual media.'

From responses to the commission's consultation paper

Background and context

- 5.1 'The media' is a hugely amorphous term. It refers not only to printed material – everything from religious journals to local and tabloid newspapers – but also to television, radio and to the ubiquitous social media. In their totality the media are both a window and a mirror: As a window they provide a selection of what happens in the world, what it's like, what's going on. As a mirror they show the self, who and what 'we' are. Inevitably therefore they affect how people see and don't see religion and belief, as indeed everything else, both individually and collectively. There is serious, thoughtful and educational treatment of religion and belief across all areas of the media. This is not, however, the whole picture.
- 5.2 Almost all responses to the commission's consultation expressed concern about the portrayal of religion and belief in the media. There was a perceived lack of religion and belief literacy among media professionals. As noted in chapter 3, improving such literacy among the public, and particularly among media outlets, is essential for bringing about our vision of a fairer and more cohesive society. This chapter discusses this and a number of other concerns and challenges that were raised throughout the consultation.
- 5.3 Criticism of the media, both in research and in our consultation, is directed primarily at news and current affairs coverage.¹ It is important in this connection to appreciate the pressures facing journalists and reporters. They must distil complicated issues into a two-minute report or a 400-word article and are subject to the whims of an ever-changing news agenda and to the demands and requirements of sub-editors and writers of headlines. In all this they have to take into account that, as a Controller of BBC Northern Ireland during the Troubles once put it, 'what, arguably, is not news, is the reiteration of normality, the assertion that all is well'. He continued:

Normality is not news, except in an abnormal context. The statement 'There were no shootings, bombings or incidents of arson in Milton Keynes yesterday', though reassuring to the citizens of that town, holds little interest for the generality of viewers elsewhere. However, substitute 'Belfast' or 'Beirut' for 'Milton Keynes' and you have news. Normality is usually to be inferred from silence rather than marked by an item in a news bulletin.²

- 5.4 News is not, then, intended to be a comprehensive portrait of the world as it exists. Rather, it is a comparison between today and yesterday of what is new, different, controversial, bad or unusual. For instance, the reason the media pay so much attention to extremism is because the consequences are so significant, especially when allied to terrorism. Good religious people going peacefully about their daily business are not news. Problems arise, however, if the exceptional is taken to be normal in the way news is interpreted by those who receive it, and if condemnations of religious extremism by leaders and representatives of faith communities are not fairly reported.

'good religious people going peacefully about their daily business are not news'

- 5.5 Yet even if allowances are made for the pressures on journalists and for the difficulty of reporting on a far from straightforward topic, and even if it is recognised that much reporting is balanced and accurate, there is widespread public dissatisfaction with how the media handle religion and belief matters.³ Virtually everyone who responded to the media section of our consultation considered that the media fail accurately to reflect these issues. They did not, though, all approach the topic from the same starting point. 'There is considerable misrepresentation and distortion of Christian belief and practice in the media,' wrote one respondent, 'so much so that it is not over-the-top to suspect that there is a controlling anti-Christian agenda at the heart of much of the press and broadcasting establishments.' Another respondent, however, voiced their perception that 'the BBC is the Christian Broadcasting Company in everything but name'.
- 5.6 If the media is an amorphous term, then so is religion and belief, as illustrated in chapter 2 of this report. The major religious and non-religious traditions and worldviews of humankind have many deep similarities, overlaps and commonalities. At the same time there are significant differences both within and between them. This often confusing picture can make reporting extremely difficult. No group, religious or non-religious, is monolithic and unchanging. Each contains differences in theological or philosophical belief and expression; each has sects, branches, opinions and schools of thought, the origins of which are often lost in the mists of time. The differences can be subtle and not always easy for the outsider, or indeed for the insider, to understand. As emphasised in chapter 1, the situation is further complicated when conflicts, appearing to originate in religion, are more accurately understood to be conflicts around resources, territory, influence, power and recognition.⁴

Concerns and challenges

- 5.7 In the following paragraphs we consider four areas of concerns and challenges: the features, benefits and dangers of social media; weaknesses in the coverage of news in the traditional media, namely print and broadcasting; notes on the way one particular religion, Islam, is all too often misrepresented both in social and in traditional media; and issues relating to freedom of speech, including the freedom to offend.

Internet and social media

- 5.8 Global sharing of information via the internet and the rise of social media are driving profound changes in society, including understandings and experiences of religion and belief.⁵ New virtual communities have been formed, many fresh expressions of religion and belief exist, older traditions are being revived and there is a developing sense of connection with fellow believers throughout the world. It is also important to recognise a sometimes blurred distinction between 'religion-online', where existing religion and belief groups communicate with believers and possible converts, and 'online religion', where new forms of religious communities and fresh expressions of belief and identity develop and continually change, often quite rapidly.⁶ Activists and intellectuals from all religions and none are establishing websites and social media profiles in order to communicate their

own ideas and religious or philosophical interpretations. It is difficult, however, to assess how much influence the internet has in the radicalisation of young people of Muslim heritage or, for example, their decision to join a movement such as ISIS.⁷

- 5.9 The scale of information available, and the speed with which communication technology is changing, can be appreciated by a few simple examples. Type the word *church* into Google and there will be 1.05 billion results. *Islam* will produce 368 million, *Hindu* 118 million and *Humanist* 11.6 million.⁸ Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, arguably the most influential websites for online connectivity in the West, greatly influence the ways we receive, select and process news, as well as the ways in which we communicate with others. There are roughly 1.49 billion active Facebook users worldwide.⁹ Since its founding less than ten years ago, Twitter now boasts an average of 307 million monthly active users.¹⁰ A 2013 survey found that only 23 per cent of adults in England, Scotland and Wales said they do not use Facebook.¹¹
- 5.10 New social media platforms have no inherent positive or negative power, for online tools themselves do not make people more or less tolerant. Their impact depends on the people who use them – and how they use them. Access to the internet allows every person to be his or her own journalist and editor since it allows organisations, including religious organisations, to transmit their own version of events without the intermediary of professional journalism – in effect, they are able to put out unfiltered propaganda and opinions. Social media sites have no editors, and users (or moderators) are expected to edit inappropriate or inaccurate content. At best they have led to a democratisation of information and the increase in user-generated content, but at worst they have resulted in an abundance of misinformation and have permitted negative content to proliferate. They challenge traditional hierarchies, since individuals communicate their own interpretations of events and texts, rather than rely on the accounts of their leaders, religious or political. But they can also therefore be used by groups to attack particular religions or their followers, or to promote extremist ideologies in the name of religion. In addition, it is easy for local issues to attract global attention in a very short space of time; for example, a controversy in the Swat region of Pakistan can have a significant impact on the streets of Bradford just hours later.

'new social media platforms have no inherent positive or negative power, for online tools themselves do not make people more or less tolerant'

- 5.11 The less personal nature of online communication makes it easier for information to be distorted or misinterpreted. With the huge array of online communities and the ease of finding those with specific interests there can be a tendency to self-select into like-minded groups, lessening the opportunity to encounter those with different opinions and be exposed to unfamiliar voices. In consequence online communication and social media allow niche communities to exist with little or no interference from wider society. Thus they do not necessarily contribute to the kinds of enriching dialogue and engagement that are considered later in this report (chapter 6). On the contrary, sectarian factions reproduce themselves easily, which can result in both positive and negative behaviour. Once posted online a message is no longer controlled by its author, who may find that for others it has meanings that were not intended.
- 5.12 A further problematic difference between social media and other types of media is anonymity. Under the cover of an alias and surrounded by virtual strangers, conventionally restrained individuals may act differently than they would in the 'real' world. One simple antidote rests in the idea of standing by one's own name. Putting your name to something, rather than using a pseudonym, means that your words carry responsibility. It is by no means always the case, however, that those who remain anonymous on the internet are viewed with more hesitation than those who put their name to their words.

- 5.13 Since the invention of printing, societies have had centuries to develop rules and etiquettes for the printed word, to recognise its potential and limitations, and to establish ways of legal redress when there is defamation. With the invention of the internet and the development of social media, societies are still trying to catch up with many of the ethical and behavioural implications – a process made more difficult by the ever-increasing speed of technological progress. The process still has a considerable distance yet to be travelled. Bodies responsible for education policy should consider including educational material on the proper and appropriate use of social media, with a view to improving the quality of discourse and reducing negative output.

Print and broadcasting

- 5.14 As mentioned earlier, widespread dissatisfaction with the traditional media's coverage of religion and belief was expressed by respondents in our consultation exercise, though with regard to print journalism far more than to broadcasting. Whilst there is more public awareness of the influence of religion and belief, there is less expertise in the media.¹² 'We are increasingly concerned,' wrote a church organisation, 'to see religious affairs correspondent posts being eroded. Whilst a religious affairs correspondent operates for the BBC this contrasts with many national print titles and commercial television and radio where there is a noticeable decline of religious literacy which may be associated with the loss of specialists. Losing so many such specialist staff creates the danger of a vicious spiral – the editorial judgment that religion is of declining public interest leading to the loss of specialist reporters, leading in turn to a trivialising or ignorant reporting of religious issues.' A prominent example of such oversimplified and sensationalised coverage is the reporting of former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams' lecture on 'Civil and Religious Law in England: a religious perspective' at the Royal Courts of Justice in 2012.¹³
- 5.15 There is a tendency to opt for a gladiatorial style of encounter, often using those who hold extreme and combative religious or non-religious positions and this can lead to distorted depictions. This is particularly problematic when a misunderstanding has been widely disavowed as invalid by the principal leaders and most followers of a religion. While it is important that journalists are free to express their disagreements with particular views, it seems that some media commentators, bloggers and columnists depict religious beliefs as dangerous and reactionary, displaying hostility and contempt for the intellectual integrity of religious believers. A similar comment could be made about religious writers who depict non-religious beliefs as morally inferior or perhaps amoral.¹⁴

'whilst there is more public awareness of the influence of religion and belief, there is less expertise in the media'

- 5.16 There is considerable concern about the coverage of certain traditions relative to their size. For example, faiths like Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism feature very little in the media.¹⁵ There is also considerable concern about the tone of coverage when they do feature. In a UK Hindu youth survey conducted in 2001 it was found that only 25 per cent of the respondents felt that the media positively represented Hinduism.¹⁶ In contrast, a 2015 survey found that 49 per cent of British Sikhs thought that Sikhs are positively reported in mainstream media, though only 23 per cent felt that British Asians in general are portrayed in a positive light.¹⁷
- 5.17 A further issue is a tendency to ignore how certain beliefs are held within various faith groups. For example, in 1999, Glenn Hoddle, the then England football manager, was forced by a media furore to resign his job after explaining his understanding of karma.¹⁸ What was not considered at the time was the fact that many Hindus, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs in the UK shared such a perspective about karma, as well as many others.

- 5.18 It is important to note that these criticisms also apply to fictional and entertainment programmes. Inaccurate and simplified pictures of religion and belief appear in some programmes where faith is a key theme or some of the characters are religious. There can also be inaccurate portrayals of social reality in general; for instance most marriages in television dramas and soaps seem to be religious services, while, in fact, about 70 per cent of marriages in England and Wales are civil ceremonies.¹⁹
- 5.19 The modern world is increasingly a soundbite culture. Long, carefully argued expositions are liable to be ignored, with perhaps only one point being seized on and hitting the headlines. So the encyclical, sermon or religious leader's long statement can rarely have the same influence over people as these striking moments and pointed soundbites imparted through journalists. The media also love charismatic characters who, by their gestures, create an immediate impression. Pope Francis is an excellent example.
- 5.20 During the last decade or so, many TV channels have significantly reduced religious broadcasting. The BBC, however, deserves special mention since its Royal charter, which is due for renewal in 2016, states that it must have regard for 'the importance of reflecting different religious and other beliefs'.²⁰ In 2014 across all its platforms it delivered over seven thousand hours of programming which encompassed a broad range of faiths and topics, including – on television – a series following the work of multi-faith chaplains and another on the difficulties and pleasures of religious fasting in Britain, while – on radio – the Asian Network and local radio broadcast Diwali celebrations from Leicester; and on Radio 4 there was a programme about the growth of a more militant form of Buddhism. News and Current Affairs output also covered a range of religious topics, including a half-hour programme on sharia law in Britain, and another on antisemitism. It is crucial to add that the BBC should not overlook its responsibility to those who are not religious. There is further reference to the BBC charter in paragraphs 5.32–33 below.

Considerable bias

The media do not handle these matters well. I see considerable bias in the BBC in favour of Faith Groups, demonstrated most clearly in the exclusion of non-religious views in Thought for Today.

from evidence to the commission

Representation of Islam

- 5.21 Many respondents referred to what they considered the unsatisfactory and often misleading representation of Islam in the media. While many groups may complain about misrepresentation, it is in reference to Islam that the misuse of language (see 5.23) seems to occur most often. Our attention was drawn to various pieces of research. One academic study, for example, has noted a subtle shift from conflict- or terrorism-dominated news output toward 'the increasing importance of stories focusing on religious and cultural differences between Islam and British culture or the West in general'.²¹ Another has found that 'references to extreme forms of Islam or Muslims are 21 times more common than references to moderate Islam or Muslims' and that 'a more subtle set of implicitly negative representations' has overtaken the crude, 'expressly negative representation of Muslims'.²² A third suggests that often Britain is constructed as a Christian country and Christianity is equated with Britishness while Islam is portrayed as receiving preferential treatment by the state at the expense of Christians, encouraging the notions that Christianity is being marginalised and that Britain is being 'Islamified'.²³

- 5.22 The tendency to attribute the actions of Muslim terrorists intrinsically to Islam itself, and hence to hold all Muslims responsible, is rightly regarded as offensive. However, the vocabulary and expertise required to report stories with the necessary nuance as well as accuracy (but without ignoring the ideology and theology the terrorists claim to espouse) is not common in the media. It is also commonplace to read about Christians opposed to, for example, gay marriage – it would be more accurate to say 'some Christians' or to make clear that statements by some conservative Christians may not represent a majority Christian position.
- 5.23 The use of language in news reporting can be unhelpful. Terms like fundamentalist, extremist, radical, conservative, liberal and traditionalist are often used sloppily, without an understanding of the context or much attempt at definition. There is careless use of religious labels when the real issue is something else, as in Muslim extremist, Islamic terrorist, or Islamist. Even the term moderate Muslim could be taken as implying that Muslim normally means fundamentalist, hard-liner; extremist or terrorist: no-one would say moderate Christian to mean non-violent, and few would consider moderate Christian to be a term of approval.²⁴ As has been well said and frequently repeated, 'extremism in the defence of liberty is no vice and moderation in the pursuit of justice is no virtue'.²⁵

Freedom of expression

- 5.24 Freedom of expression is a fundamental right protected under the Human Rights Act 1998, based on Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights. When exercised, not least by journalists, it inevitably has the potential of causing offence to some person, group or institution. As a consequence, attempts, sometimes violent, have been made to encourage them to keep quiet and some have been killed. The attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris on 7 January 2015 was an example of this process. But some have queried the dominant narrative – arguing that it is possible to have profound sympathy for the victims, to deplore the cruelty and callousness of the murderers, and to care about freedom of expression, whilst at the same time deploring the simplistic, us-and-them thinking which dominated much of the response.²⁶
- 5.25 When the media frame events in stark terms of conflict – dark versus light, good versus evil – the reader or viewer is faced with crude and facile positions. No dilemmas are presented, only declarations. What some media items lack in complexity they make up for in polemical clarity and in the provision of a clear, sometimes demonised portrayal of the other and an idealised depiction of the self. Reporting has to have nuance and substance, not just polemic: to talk, engage, dialogue and also to disagree. Ultimately, the media need to allow for difference and conflicting points of view and not fall into the trap of offering a single linear thesis to explain an event that has occurred.

*'reporting has to have nuance and substance, not just polemic:
to talk, engage, dialogue and also to disagree'*

- 5.26 A discussion of the right to free speech should both celebrate it and stress the responsibility that its exercise requires. The right carries with it the corollary that some speech will inevitably offend. This is an inescapable implication of the right. It must, however, be distinguished from situations where the offence is gratuitous, provocative, unnecessarily hurtful and appears to be the primary purpose rather than an incidental consequence of free speech – the right to free speech includes the right to offend, but the latter does not enjoy the same degree of importance and immunity. Like all rights, the right to free speech needs to be exercised with due regard for its likely consequences and respect for the sentiments and sensitivities of those affected by it. When free speech begins to sound like what the US Supreme Court called 'fighting words', it defeats its own purpose and even becomes counterproductive.

Ways forward

Religion and belief literacy

- 5.27 Serious and ongoing attempts need to be made to increase religion and belief literacy among all journalists and reporters. Possible ways of achieving this include:
- every newsroom retaining at least one religion and belief specialist, or subscribing to one specialist agency
 - short courses on political religion tailored to the needs of newsrooms
 - a core element in all media training courses to include world religions and the implications of the changing religious landscape
 - exposure to relevant resources on religious literacy in world affairs
 - the possibility of short placements in religious media outlets and organised exchanges of journalists in religious media with those in other outlets
 - a national commitment to funding such projects by relevant civil society bodies.²⁷

Ethics

- 5.28 The consultation asked a question about journalistic ethics and whether a code of ethics should exist to cover religious journalism, but we concluded that nothing beyond the existing code of general ethics is required.²⁸ As one respondent expressed it: 'We need to stick to the general principles of journalism as governed by professional codes and by the laws of libel. Otherwise we are in danger of creating a situation where religion gets special treatment, either treating it with kid gloves or too harshly.'

Advisory panel

- 5.29 Consideration should be given to establishing a panel of experts on religion and belief for the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) to use when there are complaints about the media. This may strengthen self-regulation of the media and help reassure the public about the quality of reporting on religion and belief. The panel would also be responsible for publishing an annual index of religion and belief literacy which would identify media outlets with best practice as well as those who need to improve the quality of their reporting on religion and belief. It should be noted that the Religion Media Centre is already working towards these proposals.

Awards scheme

- 5.30 It would be relevant and valuable to establish a prize (along the lines of existing prizes for religious broadcasting and for issues like mental health) which would recognise and reward the best in religion and belief coverage in the print and social media.

Media literacy

- 5.31 It would be fair to suggest there is an absence of media literacy on the part of many religion and belief institutions and leaders. A certain mutual suspicion, indeed at times antagonism, has marked their relations with the media, caused at least partially by unease at the media's desire to investigate certain aspects of the behaviour of these institutions and their failure, on occasions, to be totally open in their response.²⁹

Some of the antagonism could be reduced with increased contact between religion and belief and media representatives, to develop relationships and understanding, not simply so that complaints can be aired. One respondent argued: 'The sole responsibility for improving the media's coverage of religion rests with religious organisations and religious individuals themselves'; then they went on to say that religious organisations should perform better at getting out their story and that some were much better than others due to a combination of resources and culture.

Sudden re-emergence

I think broadcasting woke up to the wider world of faith rather too late... But I suppose what we didn't know and weren't prepared for was the sudden re-emergence of religion in the public sphere. Religion was supposed to be disappearing but had now come back with a vengeance.

from evidence to the commission

BBC

- 5.32 The coverage of religion should continue to be mandated in the BBC 2016 charter and it should take into account the UK's changing religious landscape. There should be a reference in the charter to the exploration of ethical dilemmas and the need for the public to come together at times of national grief or celebration.
- 5.33 *Thought for the Day*, broadcast on Radio 4 on weekday mornings, is described by the BBC as 'an archive of reflection from a faith perspective on topical issues and news events from a diverse range of speakers from across the world's major faiths'.³⁰ One difficulty is that this formula implies that contributors will have a religious affiliation even though the British Social Attitudes Survey puts the figure of those who self-identify as having 'no religion' at 49 per cent of the population.³¹ Slots in *Thought for the Day* are at present restricted to members of faith communities, but this should be extended to include contributions from those who would speak from a non-religious perspective, including humanists, provided the contribution meets the required professional standards regarding quality and balance. BBC editorial guidelines should continue not to permit speakers to attack religion, religious believers or non-religious worldviews.

Commercial channels and stations

- 5.34 Major commercial channels and stations should examine their policies on the coverage of religious topics to ensure that the place of religion and belief in society is adequately represented.

1 The public's trust in the mainstream media has declined in recent years. A 2013 survey of 2,096 adults in Britain found that 71 per cent said they did not trust journalists to tell the truth. Survation (2013), p. 31.

2 Morris (1986), p. 7.

3 A 2011 survey of members of different religious organisations found that 51 per cent said they had experienced unfair treatment in relation to the media on the basis of their religion or belief. This rose to 79 per cent of Muslim, 78 per cent of 'Other Christian', 75 per cent of 'NRM/Pagan' and 72 per cent of Jain participants. See Weller et al (2013), pp. 109–119.

4 For an overview of recent scholarship on the transformative interplay between forms of media and forms of religion and belief, see Knott and Mitchell (2012).

5 See, for example, Dawson and Cowan (2004).

6 A distinction originally made in Helland (2000).

7 For a review of recent research on the role of the internet in processes of radicalisation, see Behr et al (2013).

8 As of September 2015 using <https://www.google.co.uk/>.

- 9 As of September 2015. See <http://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide>.
- 10 As of September 2015. See <http://www.statista.com/statistics/282087/number-of-monthly-active-twitter-users/>.
- 11 Survation (2013), p.51.
- 12 For discussions of religious literacy among media professionals see, for example, Graham (2012); Wakelin and Spencer (2015).
- 13 See, for example, George (2011).
- 14 For the debate on whether, overall, mainstream newspaper and television outlets are 'biased' against religion and / or consist of personnel who are less religious and more secularist than the general population, see for example Woolley (2012); Knott, Poole and Taira (2013), pp. 111–113, 181–182. For an analysis of interviews with British (and Finnish) journalists and editors about attitudes towards religion and the reporting of religion within the media, see Mutanen (2009).
- 15 Based on an analysis of newspaper and television references to religion and the 'secular sacred' in 2008–2009, it has been argued that it is media attention to political Islam that gives the false impression that other non-Christian religions are under-reported. Research shows that coverage of *all* non-Christian religions is in point of fact reductive and stereotypical, paying little attention to internal diversity within each faith (Knott, Poole and Taira, 2013, pp. 56, 90–93).
- 16 Santosh and Vij (2003), p. 38.
- 17 British Sikh Report (2015), p. 9.
- 18 BBC (1999).
- 19 See University of Oxford (2015).
- 20 Department for Culture, Media and Sport (2006).
- 21 Moore, Mason and Lewis (2008), p. 3.
- 22 Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013).
- 23 Knott, Poole and Taira (2013). For further analyses of media representations of Islam, see, for example, Poole (2011).
- 24 See Harris, Bisset and Weller (2015).
- 25 Senator Barry Goldwater in 1964. Washington Post Company (1998).
- 26 See, for example, Modood (2015) and Klug, B. (2015).
- 27 These recommendations are set out by Taylor (2014).
- 28 See the National Union of Journalists' Code of Conduct: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/about/nuj-code/>.
- 29 See the comments on this by Mark Thompson, Director-General of the BBC (2004–2012). Thompson (2008).
- 30 See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0187g27>.
- 31 NatCen (2015).

6. DIALOGUE

The quality of relationship

'There is no shortcut, no easy guide. Rather, one by one, each of us must take responsibility. We have to do the work of building relations and communities ourselves. The process is not about acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills – although these are important. It is more to do with the quality of relationship we bring to all our encounters with others.'

'No one, no party and no tradition has a monopoly on truth, but ... the truth will not be disclosed unless participants in dialogue passionately believe themselves to be right whilst holding open the possibility that they may be wrong.'

From responses to the commission's consultation paper

Background and context

- 6.1 Processes of constructive engagement and dialogue between people holding different beliefs and worldviews, and belonging to different traditions and backgrounds, have vital roles to play in the tasks of building and maintaining relationships of mutual understanding and trust, and of strengthening the bonds of community. In the words of the vision statement at the start of chapter 3, they help people 'to feel they are a positive part of an ongoing national story ... to know that their culture, religion and beliefs are embraced as part of a continuing process of mutual enrichment, and that their contributions to the texture of the nation's common life are valued'.
- 6.2 Dialogue has the potential to achieve several separate but interrelated objectives. Participants seek to understand each other; to discover the common ground underlying their differences; to resolve their differences when that is possible, and to learn to live with them when it is not. Dialogue brings people together in mutual engagement and helps to create a shared society and a climate of civility and trust. To achieve these and related objectives, it needs to be guided by certain procedural and substantive principles. It needs, for example, to be sincere and based on mutual respect and not to be or appear to be a mere public relations exercise or an attempt to seek converts. Participants should be able to speak for themselves out of their own experiences and to feel free to express their disagreements and uncertainties on contentious issues. They should be ready both to make and to receive criticism, and to point to areas where they themselves as well as others might be mistaken or misguided.

'dialogue brings people together in mutual engagement and helps to create a shared society and a climate of civility and trust'

- 6.3 Dialogue calls, therefore, for humility and a capacity for self-criticism. In the words of a respondent quoted at the head of this chapter, it should be 'based on the understanding that no one, no party and no tradition has a monopoly on truth, but (perhaps paradoxically) this is not an excuse for relativism, since the truth will not be disclosed unless participants in dialogue passionately believe themselves to be right whilst holding open the possibility that they may be wrong'.¹ When understood in this way, dialogue reflects the wider vision of society that guides this report – a society where the dignity of difference is appreciated and where people of all religions and beliefs feel equally valued, and equally able to contribute to the ongoing national story. Dialogue, as thus understood, is fundamental in every conversation on the religion and belief landscape – in the media, in schools and universities, in places where two or three people are gathered together; in the great inter- and intra-civilisational encounters between religion and belief in the modern globalised world.²

'dialogue, as thus understood, is fundamental in every conversation on the religion and belief landscape'

- 6.4 As a consequence of work in recent decades by a wide range of individuals and organisations, the development of structured patterns of dialogue in the UK is further advanced than in most other countries. Challenges remain, however. This chapter begins with a review of the development of interreligious dialogue in the UK, and highlights a range of notable achievements. It then turns to the principal challenges that still need to be addressed.
- 6.5 It was during the first half of the twentieth century that formal interreligious initiatives began to be developed in Britain, bringing together people from different traditions. The London Society of Jews and Christians was founded in 1927, the World Congress of Faiths in 1936 and the Council of Christians and Jews in 1942. More recent decades have seen a remarkable growth in such activity, largely in response to the increased religious diversity which developed from migration in the 1950s and 1960s onwards.³ A number of early initiatives, and those that followed, focused on spiritual or doctrinal exploration and discussion, but in recent decades the primary goal has usually been to foster good community relations. There has also been an increased interest in the beliefs and practices of different religious traditions with a view to better mutual understanding, since sincere dialogue leads not only to a better understanding of the other, but also of oneself. Resources have been created which help members of faith communities to engage effectively with people whose traditions and beliefs are different from their own. Increasingly important are the roles of intra-faith dialogue – between people from different strands within a single tradition – and of dialogue between those who have a religious affiliation and those who do not.
- 6.6 Formal interreligious dialogue may be bilateral, trilateral or multilateral. Multilateral engagement is important in a shared society, but is valuably supplemented by dialogue between two or three traditions; this can make it possible to go more deeply into painful shared histories which affect contemporary perceptions and experiences. Specific kinds of dialogue include meetings between women from different traditions, between young people, and between scholars and academics. Further, dialogue takes place at a range of different levels: local, national, UK-wide and international.
- 6.7 The creation of the Inter Faith Network for the UK in 1987, which links national bodies, local organisations and educational and academic bodies, has been an important factor in giving interreligious work added momentum and cohesion through sharing good practice, holding regular meetings and seminars, producing resource materials and facilitating engagement with government and other public bodies. Separate linking organisations have been in place for Northern Ireland since 1993, Scotland since 1999, and Wales since 2004.⁴ These linking bodies at UK and national levels have played key roles not only in the field of interreligious dialogue but also in initiating and supporting engagement with government and other public bodies.

- 6.8 The development of patterns of interreligious engagement and dialogue has made a particularly valuable contribution to building community cohesion and integration at local levels. Between 1987 and 2015, the number of local interfaith organisations increased from 30 to over 230.⁵ There are also over 30 local branches of the Council of Christians and Jews,⁶ and some local groups linked to the Women's Interfaith Network, mainly in London and the South East, and to 3FF, formerly the Three Faiths Forum. Formal local interfaith structures now exist not only in areas of the country which are significantly diverse, but also in many that are less so. They vary, of course, in their character and effectiveness. A few have paid staff but most operate on a purely voluntary basis.⁷ Some set out to represent formally the pluralist character of their locality and to engage on this basis with the local authority and other public bodies, and some of these have been set up with the active encouragement of the relevant local authority. More informal groups bring together individuals whose primary interest is to learn more about one another's religious traditions. A significant number seek to combine these two roles.
- 6.9 There has also been a significant increase in the growth of interfaith organisations with a special focus. These include bilateral bodies such as the Christian-Muslim Forum, the Hindu-Christian Forum and the Joseph Interfaith Foundation, which fosters Jewish-Muslim dialogue, and UK branches of international organisations, such as Religions for Peace, the International Association for Religious Freedom and the United Religions Initiative. Since 2009, Inter Faith Week, drawing on the experience of the Scottish Inter Faith Week (first held in 2004), takes place annually in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.⁸ Such activities provide a valuable focus on engagement and dialogue and have succeeded in drawing in a large number of people new to interreligious activity.
- 6.10 The number of people who have no religious commitment has been steadily increasing in recent years, as noted and emphasised in chapter 2. They may be atheists or agnostics, may see themselves as belonging to a humanist tradition, or may be among the growing number who describe themselves as spiritual but not religious. There is a long tradition in this country, as elsewhere, of philosophical, as distinct from religious, reflection on fundamental questions such as the nature of the universe and frameworks of ethics. These have been the subject of discussion and argument across the centuries. In the years after the Second World War, formal dialogue took place more frequently between people who were religious and those who were not, for example in radio and television programmes with this specific purpose. The Vatican was active in organising seminars involving Catholics and non-religious participants.⁹ In more recent years structured engagement of this kind has been less common. However, the debate stirred up by the recent publications of 'the new atheists', as they are known, is now leading to a renewal of dialogue between religious and non-religious worldviews, for example in the work of the 3FF and the Religious Education Council of England and Wales.

'in the years after the Second World War, formal dialogue took place more frequently between people who were religious and those who were not'

- 6.11 Many people find it difficult to engage in conversations about religion and belief, particularly if they encounter hostility towards their own positions. Dialogue is a skill that, like any other, can be taught and learnt, even if it requires a certain element of will and desire to develop fully. Helpfully, a variety of published resources and courses and events offering guidance for dialogue and developing associated skills are now available for those getting involved in the dialogue process. For example, the code of conduct produced in 1991 by the Inter Faith Network outlines some fundamental principles for engagement between people of different traditions, and commitment to it is required from any organisation wishing to become one of the Network's member bodies. It has been widely distributed and has also been adopted in other countries.¹⁰ St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace in London has developed workshops and handbooks on dialogue to help

improve relevant skills.¹¹ In Scotland a useful good practice guide, *Belief in Dialogue*, was produced in 2011 by an independent working group set up by the Scottish government, with Interfaith Scotland playing a key role in the project.¹²

- 6.12 In addition to patterns of formal dialogue, many kinds of valuable more informal conversation take place. Examples include engagement with people of different beliefs and backgrounds in the workplace, schools, professional bodies, the local neighbourhood or through joint activities, such as sport, sharing food together or involvement in the work of voluntary organisations of all kinds. Not to be underestimated is what has been called ‘silent dialogue’ – the everyday experiences that people have simply as a result of living within a diverse community.¹³

“silent dialogue” – the everyday experiences that people have simply as a result of living within a diverse community

- 6.13 As noted in chapter 4, education in religion and belief at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, as well as in a variety of forms of adult education is of crucial importance for improving the knowledge and understanding of different communities, their traditions and their ways of life. Educational and academic bodies exploring relevant issues have made a significant contribution to the resourcing of the dialogue process. In England and Wales the requirement for local authorities to establish standing advisory councils on religious education (SACREs) has created valuable forums in which interreligious exchange may take place.¹⁴
- 6.14 It is not easy to assess, especially in quantitative terms, the value of interreligious activities. Sometimes they are characterised as being no more than ‘tea and samosas’; this, however, seriously ignores their range. Moreover, dialogue is arguably always of value even at the most basic level of human engagement and encounter. While it is possible to note the rise in the number of interfaith organisations and of people taking part in their activities,¹⁵ only a qualitative judgement can be made of the impact of dialogue in terms of mutual understanding and the building of key relationships of trust. It is not just positive outcomes that are a measure of this, but also the avoidance of negative ones. It is true that interfaith organisations do not have large memberships. However, that in itself is not an adequate criterion for assessing their value, for participants carry new understandings into their communities. In this way, participation is vicarious as well as direct.

Challenges and concerns

- 6.15 The scene described above shows that the processes of dialogue are flourishing in the UK at various levels and in various ways. It is vital that these processes are maintained and developed. There are, however, a number of issues that need to be addressed if this work is to continue, and if it is to be successful in bringing about substantive change for the better in our communities. The range of dialogue needs to be expanded, and there are problems around representation, around security and counter-extremism, and around funding. These topics are discussed in turn in the following paragraphs.

Range of dialogue

- 6.16 There are areas of dialogue which need to be expanded. Many of the existing initiatives for bilateral or trilateral engagement have an Abrahamic context – Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The greater attention paid in public discourse to these traditions can leave people from other religious traditions feeling a lack of parity in their public profile and the public square. The historical and numerical reasons for this imbalance are understandable, but it needs to be corrected.¹⁶ Undoubtedly there is scope for more bilateral dialogue between Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions.¹⁷

- 6.17 It has long been recognised that special efforts are required to promote engagement between young people of different faiths and beliefs.¹⁸ There is also a need for more dialogue which focuses specifically on engagement between those who are religious and those who are not, with a variety of patterns of engagement of non-religious people with dialogue partners from one, two or more religious traditions. As shown throughout this report, it is essential that free debate about secularism and the place of religion and belief in the public square continues apace; however, there also needs to be structured dialogue on the substantive content of different philosophical, as well as religious, traditions. There is a wide range of non-religious perspectives and beliefs, just as there is among those who have a religious commitment. But there are no non-religious communities in the same sense as there are individual faith communities and this is an important factor in organising broader dialogue processes. The British Humanist Association, for example, does not claim to represent all those who are not religious. It does, though, currently have a dialogue officer who can help facilitate the participation of humanists in dialogue events.¹⁹ In Scotland there has been significant progress in recent years in developing regular engagement between Scottish Churches and the Humanist Society Scotland (HSS). As noted in chapter 4, in 2014 a joint document on replacing the requirement for a regular religious observance in schools with a time for reflection was produced jointly by the Church of Scotland and the HSS.²⁰

Start climbing

... the old analogy that there is a mountain called truth and that there are many paths to its summit; we cannot spend our lives searching at the bottom for the one true path to take; we should rather pick the one that seems best to us and start climbing; as we climb we need to remember that others are climbing on different paths

from evidence to the commission

- 6.18 There are increasing numbers of women involved in interreligious activity, but more effort is needed to secure an appropriate gender balance within dialogue structures, particularly since faith community members who act in a representative capacity are predominantly male, and this has an impact in the context of formal dialogue.²¹ Projects intended to challenge the gender imbalance include STEPS (Standing Together to Encourage the Participation of Sisters), launched by Kirklees Faiths Forum to provide women with the tools and skills to engage in their local communities and the public square more broadly.²²
- 6.19 Internet forums and social media enable ever more people, from an increasingly wide range of perspectives, to engage in dialogue. This presents a challenge, however, to those responsible for running dialogue activities since they have to adapt to a new operating environment. As discussed in chapter 5, the growth of online activity is not an unmixed blessing given that there are both valuable and pernicious resources to be found on the internet, and unmoderated interaction can hinder rather than help the building of mutual understanding and trust.

Engagement with government

- 6.20 At both national and local levels, government can help to set the tone and context for dialogue through its approach to community relations and integration, and through its own practices of engagement and dialogue. In the period 1997–2005, new patterns of engagement between faith communities and government were established.²³ In England at national level the Faith Communities Consultative Council (FCCC) came into being, but the coalition government of 2010–15 dismantled it on the grounds that it did not favour standing forums. It did, though, indicate that ministers and officials would be willing to attend meetings of the Faith

Communities Forum, which had been established by the Inter Faith Network in 2003 prior to the setting up of the FCCC. The Inter-Faith Council for Wales was set up within the structures of the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Government engages regularly with Interfaith Scotland and faith community organisations as well as Humanist Society Scotland.

- 6.21 Mechanisms for consultation processes need to ensure that the concerns and opinions of all groups are available to those taking decisions on public policy even if no single forum can achieve this. It is crucially important that faith communities do not feel they have been manipulated in setting up these consultative mechanisms, and that engagement and consultation have not been restricted to those whose views are palatable for the government or a public body to hear. Genuine engagement needs to allow for a robust critique of government policy where participants think this is warranted. There will always be a need for variety in patterns of government engagement, for example with particular communities, but some form of multilateral engagement is desirable to promote a sense of cohesive purpose.
- 6.22 In structured engagement of a formal kind, whether between communities or with government and other public bodies, there may be difficult issues at both national and local levels to do with how different communities can best be represented with integrity. The presence of several bodies within a community claiming a representative role can add complexities which need to be resolved with careful handling. Where broadly accepted representative structures are not in place within a community, as they are for example in the Anglican or Catholic churches, it may be necessary to be satisfied with a situation in which participants are in a position to articulate the hopes and concerns of a community even if they are not formally designated as its representatives. There may also be practical limits to the range of groups which can be accommodated within the space of a single meeting. But it should be noted that smaller faith communities often make a contribution to interfaith work out of all proportion to their size. More generally, it is desirable wherever possible to seek greater inclusivity.
- 6.23 Some religion or belief groups may be hesitant whether others around the table are ones with which they can – or should – be publicly seen to engage in dialogue. Questions can arise in a variety of contexts about the appropriateness of inviting particular groups into the circle of engagement and dialogue, especially if they do not come from a longstanding and accepted tradition. The perspective of a host organisation or those issuing invitations to an event will, of course, be an important factor. It is, however, significant that the Inter Faith Network for the UK, after considerable discussion, has recently broadened the range of faith traditions which can be considered for membership of it.²⁴ Interfaith Scotland, similarly after long consultation, has adopted an approach which has increased the number of faith traditions with full membership and other bodies may have associate membership.

Security and counter-extremism and the impact of events overseas

- 6.24 The current political and media focus on issues of extremism, in both its violent and non-violent forms, and on disturbing overseas events, particularly the activities of ISIS, has created a difficult climate for interreligious dialogue at the present time, but has also served as a strong reminder of its importance. The sense which many Muslims have expressed of their entire community being stigmatised for the actions of a few, and of being beleaguered and isolated in the current debates and legislative proposals on extremism makes it all the more important for good interreligious relations to be maintained and for difficult issues to be tackled. There is further consideration of this matter in chapter 8.

'We must not import conflict. We must export peace instead.'

- 6.25 There is a constant need to build good relationships. It is important for them to be put in place as a sound basis before difficult times arrive. It was in part the patient work of local interfaith initiatives across previous years that made it possible for faith community representatives, and people more generally, to come together publicly to show their solidarity in the face of the London bombings in July 2005 and at the time of the killing of Drummer Lee Rigby in 2014. Years of past dialogue involving Jews and Muslims in the UK in a variety of national settings and personal relationships provided a context in which the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Muslim Council of Britain came together to issue a joint statement at the height of the conflict in Gaza in 2014, affirming their intention to continue to work hard for good community relations in the UK. 'We must not import conflict,' they said. 'We must export peace instead.'²⁵
- 6.26 Experience suggests that engagement and dialogue are of great importance in tackling extremism and addressing the contexts for this. Examples include the initiation of peace talks by people of faith in Northern Ireland in the 1980s; and the building of closer relationships between different communities in Leeds – from which the bombers of 7 July 2005 came – as was strongly emphasised in the commission's regional hearing held in that city. Dialogue is a key tool in situations of this kind.

Funding

- 6.27 Government, at both national and local level, can help set the tone and context for dialogue and engagement through its approach to community relations and integration, and its own practices of engagement and dialogue. It can also do so through the provision of funding, as the following paragraphs show. Yet there are concerns about the availability of funding for activities promoting dialogue, as described in 6.31-2.
- 6.28 In recent years, processes of dialogue have received direct financial support from government at both local and national levels, in recognition of the contribution which they can make to enhancing community cohesion and creating a more integrated society. Incidentally, the value of the work of interreligious organisations in helping to create community cohesion was already recognised by central government long before the disturbances in northern towns in 2001 and before the terrorist attacks later that year in the US and in 2005 in London.²⁶

Worth of a fellow human being

Effective dialogue within and between different religious and non-religious individuals and groups begins with a recognition of the intrinsic worth of a fellow human being- a friend whom you have yet to get to know.

from evidence to the commission

- 6.29 In subsequent years it became increasingly accepted that it is appropriate to make public funding available for this activity. The Inter Faith Network received some funding for the three years from April 2001 and the level of this increased in the following years. Grants were also made available to a variety of organisations for interfaith work during 2006 to 2008 under the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund.²⁷ There was a complementary desire on the government's part, as noted in Chapter 7, to encourage faith community engagement in social action. Both interests were brought together in the document published in 2008 entitled *Face to Face and Side by Side: a framework for partnership in our multi-faith society*. The first part of the title refers to interreligious engagement and dialogue, and the second to co-operative social action.²⁸ During 2008-11 funding was provided under a new Faiths in Action Fund in support of local activities, including interreligious work. This included support for the English Regional Faith Forums, which made an important contribution

though few are now still operating.²⁹ The Scottish government provides funding to Interfaith Scotland, first made available in 2002. Neither the Inter-Faith Council for Wales nor the Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum has received funding from its respective government. However, in Wales a Faith Communities Forum operates within the Welsh government, serviced by civil servants.³⁰

- 6.30 The coalition government, 2010-15, saw its role as being one of providing the conditions for integration rather than of engaging in more direct intervention, as set out in *Creating the Conditions for Integration*, published in 2012.³¹ It did not put in place any new funding scheme for local interfaith organisations, but it did encourage local government to offer support to them. Further, it provided major funding for the Church Urban Fund, whose *Near Neighbours* programme includes small grants for projects which develop positive relationships and cooperative social action to improve local neighbourhoods in multi-faith areas.³² Funding was also provided for the *Together in Service* programme,³³ reflecting the view that people come to know each other better, and develop stronger relationships, when engaging together on a social action project, as emphasised later in paragraph 7.28.³⁴ Yet it is not a case of either/or. Rather, both social action and structured dialogue are needed and mutually reinforce each other, with each leading to the other.
- 6.31 Funding for dialogue is not, however, easy to find. Faith communities are supportive but have their own financial challenges. Grant-giving trusts and foundations are wary of funding projects and programmes related to religion and belief, even on an interfaith and nondenominational basis, and are in any case disinclined to fund such projects on an ongoing basis. Companies are not naturally drawn to support interreligious projects.³⁵ Lottery funding is not acceptable to some interfaith bodies in view of principled objections to gambling on the part of some of their members.
- 6.32 Dialogue which is sustained over a period of time with a significant degree of continuity amongst its participants can go deeper and therefore bear more fruit. This is in itself an important part of the case for longer-term funding, whether from public or charitable sources. There also needs to be a realistic understanding of what a given level of funding can achieve. The financial pressures on local authorities have led to the withdrawal of funding from some local interfaith organisations. Many of these which have become more formally established, perhaps with some initial funding, find themselves struggling to cope with the level of requests for responses to public consultations and requests for help and guidance from a variety of public and other voluntary bodies, as well as from individuals. Few of them now have full- or part-time staff. It is not yet known whether there will be changes in the approach of the present government concerning its support of interreligious activity and its engagement more generally with religion and belief groups.

‘dialogue which is sustained over a period of time with a significant degree of continuity amongst its participants can go deeper and therefore bear more fruit’

Ways forward

- 6.33 It is vital that processes of dialogue are nurtured and encouraged. Most people have at least some knowledge of other religions and beliefs as a result of religious education lessons at school and through television programmes. Religion and belief groups have a key role in encouraging their members to play their part in encounter and dialogue by emphasising that they can do so with integrity, not having to hide their beliefs but rather helping others to understand them, while showing a complementary willingness to learn more about the views of others. This means that communities need to develop in their members the necessary self-confidence for this, which requires that leaders of religion and belief communities are equipped adequately for this task by the training they receive.

- 6.34 There needs to be wide recognition that, in a plural society like the UK's, encounter and dialogue are of crucial importance for creating mutual understanding of one another's beliefs and practices, establishing common ground and building relationships of trust between people of different faiths and beliefs. They are also important for developing people's capacities to disagree with one another with courtesy and restraint. In a society where politics and the media are too often based on an adversarial approach, as discussed in chapter 5, dialogue can be a valuable antidote to the stereotyping of others. At a time when the international context for dialogue is particularly fraught, it is important to ensure that good interreligious relations are maintained in the UK despite the pressures that events overseas place on them.

Development of intolerance

I believe that intolerance develops when individuals grow up and live in a monochromatic environment where they only interact with people from their own cultural and religious background, and where they learn only about their own religious beliefs. The consequence is that they are ignorant about the beliefs of others, and furthermore have no comprehension that these alternative beliefs have their own internal logic and history.

from evidence to the commission

- 6.35 It should be a high priority, not only for interfaith organisations but also for all religion and belief groups, educational institutions, public bodies and voluntary organisations, to promote opportunities for encounter and dialogue. Particularly important needs and priorities include the following:
- that leaders of religion and belief groups should, with appropriate training, have good knowledge of the different traditions and communities within the UK, and should encourage their members to participate in dialogue and to help develop and maintain good relations within society
 - that faith communities should consider opening their places of worship at regular intervals to welcome and engage with those from other groups within their locality, and should explore the possibilities of twinning arrangements with other communities
 - that in order to supplement existing patterns of dialogue between the Abrahamic faiths there should be more bilateral dialogue between Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions
 - that there should be more structured dialogue between those who are religious and those who are not
 - that more encounter and dialogue among young people should be promoted
 - that more women should become involved in interfaith structures in representative roles and that faith communities should facilitate this.
- 6.36 As has been noted, considerable progress has been made in developing interreligious activity in the UK in recent years. In view of the value of this in terms of integration and the promotion of cohesive communities, it is vital that the necessary engagement and dialogue processes are adequately resourced from a variety of sources to enable such work to be maintained. The commission has concluded that:
- Major trusts and corporate responsibility programmes should consider the possibility, within their aims, of supporting projects at both local and national level to develop interreligious understanding and/or which bring faith groups together to work on social projects.

- Government also has an important role in promoting this work, and, we believe the financial support of the UK and Scottish governments for the linking bodies of the UK and Scotland (the Inter Faith Network for the UK and Interfaith Scotland) has been and will continue to be, very important. These kinds of body play a key role, but their core work is hard to fund through other sources, notwithstanding the support of faith communities, many of which have their own financial challenges at the present time.
- There should be government funding schemes available in all the four nations for other voluntary national, regional and local organisations in support of dialogue projects and activity.
- Government funding for interreligious dialogue should continue and the criteria for government grants should ensure that they serve to underpin the aspirations of the recipient bodies themselves, which should also be given help in identifying alternative sources of funding in readiness for when grants expire.
- Local authorities should consider what help they can offer to promote engagement between different religion and belief groups in their areas, whilst themselves modelling good practice in their own engagement processes.

- 1 Ipgrave (2015) explores grassroots manifestations of these perspectives in interreligious dialogue.
- 2 For further reading on these themes, see for example Sacks (2002), (2009); Küng (1993); Küng and Kuschel (2006); Race (2001). The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations works to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue on an international level. See Alliance of Civilizations (2006).
- 3 Pearce (2012), p. 152.
- 4 Northern Ireland Inter-Faith Forum, <http://niinterfaithforum.org/>; Interfaith Scotland (formerly the Scottish Inter Faith Council), <http://www.interfaithscotland.org/>; Inter-Faith Council for Wales, <http://www.cytun.org.uk/interfaithwales/index.html>. For the Inter Faith Network for the UK, see <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/>.
- 5 For a list of local interfaith organisations in the UK, see <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/uk-activity/local-inter-faith-groups-list>.
- 6 See <http://www.ccj.org.uk/branches/>.
- 7 See Inter Faith Network for the UK (2009).
- 8 See <http://www.interfaithweek.org/>.
- 9 In 1965 the Vatican created the Secretariat for Non-believers as a focal point for dialogue between Catholics and non-religious people. By 1993 this had merged with the Pontifical Council for Culture. See <http://www.cultura.va/content/cultura/en/organico/profilo.html>. In recent years the Vatican has organised a series of religious and non-religious dialogue events through its Courtyard of the Gentiles initiative. See <http://www.cortiledegentili.com/>.
- 10 Inter Faith Network for the UK (1993).
- 11 See, for example, St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace (2009), (n.d.).
- 12 The Scottish Working Group on Religion and Belief Relations (2011).
- 13 See Buber (1958).
- 14 There are no comparable organisations in Northern Ireland and Scotland.
- 15 For example, in 2013/14 the Inter Faith Network for the UK was aware of 243 local interfaith organisations operating on a multi-faith basis in the UK, compared to 185 such organisations in 2005. In November 2013 469 organisations are recorded as having taken part in Inter Faith Week in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, across at least 409 events (a 29 per cent increase in the number of events compared to the 2012 Week). Inter Faith Network for the UK (2012), p. 4; (2014a), pp. 4–5; (2015), p. 9.
- 16 See paragraph 5.16. For an analysis of efforts to correct this imbalance in relation to Christian-Hindu dialogue, see Frazier (2011). Frazier notes that models of dialogue developed between Abrahamic traditions may not be suitable for dialogue between Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions. Frazier (2011), p. 5.
- 17 As indicated in chapter 3: note 14, the broad distinction between Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) and Dharmic faiths (generally considered to include Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism and Sikhism) is widespread throughout the world in both academic and popular usage. It is open to a range of objections and criticisms, however; and is not universally accepted. Sikhism, for example, is considered a Dharmic religion by many Sikhs but not by all.
- 18 A number of organisations are now actively involved in such work, for example 3FF through its work in facilitating dialogue in schools, and the National Union of Students through a useful toolkit on good relations on campus. The Inter Faith Network has recently established a microwebsite about initiatives created by, with and for young people. As part of its consultation processes the commission itself held a national conference for young people. See <http://www.3ff.org.uk/schools/>; <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/strong-students-unions/faith-and-belief> and <http://youth.interfaith.org.uk/>.

- 19 See <https://humanism.org.uk/community/dialogue-with-others/>.
- 20 BBC (2014). See paragraph 4.17.
- 21 This issue was noted in a 2006 survey of interreligious initiatives in the UK run by and / or for women. See Mubarak (2006), pp. 9–10.
- 22 See <http://www.kirkleesfaithsforum.org.uk/projects/21-steps-standing-together-to-encourage-the-participation-of-sisters>.
- 23 From 1997 the New Labour government placed increasing emphasis on faith-based and interreligious organisations as a source of social capital for civil renewal and community cohesion. See DeHanas, O'Toole and Meer (2013).
- 24 See the Inter Faith Network for the UK's membership admission policy, which was agreed upon in May 2014. Inter Faith Network for the UK (2014b).
- 25 The Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Muslim Council of Britain (2014).
- 26 See chapter 6: note 23.
- 27 The Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund invested a total of £13.8 million in religious communities. For evaluations see James (2007); Spratt with James (2008).
- 28 Department for Communities and Local Government (2008).
- 29 The Faiths in Action fund provided £4.4 million for faith, interfaith, VCS groups and organisations in England, supporting 575 projects in total. The Regional Faiths Forum (RFF) programme provided £1.9 million to the RRFs in England; only four still operate. For an evaluation of both funding programmes, see Pearmain (2011).
- 30 See <http://gov.wales/topics/people-and-communities/equality-diversity/rightsequality/faith/faithforum1/?lang=en>.
- 31 Department for Communities and Local Government (2012). For discussion of the coalition government in this regard, see DeHanas, O'Toole and Meer (2013).
- 32 See <https://www.cuf.org.uk/how-we-help/near-neighbours>.
- 33 See <http://www.faithaction.net/work/together-in-service/>.
- 34 In January 2015 the government announced an additional source of funding, calling for bids for a £400,000 programme to 'strengthen and support faith institutions'. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/strengthening-faith-institutions-programme-bidding-documents>.
- 35 On the difficulties religion and belief groups have reported in gaining funding, see paragraph 7.19.

7. ACTION

Ordinary people of good will

'Ordinary people of good will, across different belief and political traditions ... can help to rehumanise systems (public and private) that have lost their soul, reshape the economy by making smart financial choices, reclaim responsibility and belonging by strengthening local virtuous institutions, [and] reconnect sections of a fractured society.'

'... the vital work of building communities and loving people – work that is very difficult for a state to do.'

From responses to the commission's consultation paper

Background and context

- 7.1 The most visible component of a shared society, the kind of society envisioned in chapter 3 of this report, is the way ordinary people engage with each other in the public square. In the third sector, as it is customarily known – the sphere of voluntary action undertaken by non-governmental organisations – citizens come together across a diversity of religions and beliefs to work for the common good, locally, nationally and internationally. Much of this vital work is done in secular and non-religious organisations, though individuals in them may well be inspired and motivated by a personal faith or moral outlook. This chapter focuses primarily, however, on the work of organisations that have developed explicitly around religion and belief.
- 7.2 Religion and belief make an important contribution to social action not least because of their capacity and motivation to address local need.¹ To note this is not to question the valuable role of secular organisations, nor is it to deny that the association with a particular community of religion or belief may be historical and no longer influential. In today's context, religion- and belief-based organisations are usually situated in one community but increasingly serve individuals of all religions and beliefs. This has happened before, for Christian churches played an important role in the past in launching health, welfare and social services that now are delivered by governmental agencies. Today, churches, mosques, synagogues and temples host and support social projects that address local social need. Some of this support is ongoing (for example, food banks, homeless shelters and debt advice) and some occurs in response to particular crises. For example, there was the role religion and belief groups played in supporting and feeding farmers during the foot and mouth crisis. The current refugee crisis is another example.
- 7.3 Voluntary action provides a vital complement to – and occasionally a substitute for – public sector services. It offers an alternative perspective on social need and social obligation. Inspired by a range of different faiths and beliefs, its initiatives include food banks, drop-in centres for counselling and advice, cafes and lunch clubs, job clubs, sports and arts activities, and youth clubs. Through such work they provide support during periods of community stress, stimulate high levels of volunteering, reduce loneliness, promote neighbourliness and mutual concern, and provide a basis and platform for speaking out against intolerance and injustice. Community activists of all religions and beliefs speak truth to those with political and economic power, for they are in

close daily contact with people facing difficult circumstances and are not, with rare exceptions, championing party political agendas or implementing specific policies. Instead, their work offers a vital, relationship-based corrective to the more target-driven delivery model of public services and private contractors.²

‘community activists of all religions and beliefs speak truth to those with political and economic power, for they are in close daily contact with people facing difficult circumstances’

- 7.4 In previous centuries, more radical forms of social action tended to come from renewal movements within the national churches. While the national churches have tended to use a language of ‘social responsibility’ (Church of England) or ‘church and nation’ (Church of Scotland),³ more radical critiques of the existing social order have come from dissenting traditions, for example the ‘social holiness’ of Wesleyan Methodism and Quakerism, and the pioneering work of William and Catherine Booth in the Salvation Army. The same also comes from minorities within the national churches, for example the Clapham Sect evangelicals who played an important role in the abolition of slavery, and the Anglo-Catholic slum priests and religious orders who ministered in the poorest areas of many cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
- 7.5 Today’s context is characterised both by greater religious diversity than existed in the past and by a major increase in the number of citizens who do not identify with or participate in the life of any faith community. The role of religion and belief in social action has thus changed significantly in recent years. Faith-based organisations work in the same areas as a large number of secular voluntary institutions such as credit unions, housing associations and Citizens Advice Bureau, as well as national voluntary sector organisations such as Age UK, Barnardo’s and Mind. The common challenges include fundraising as well as the increasing demand for services and growing complexity of need. At the same time, faith-based organisations often have access to diversified resources, including the recruitment of volunteers and the ownership or use of physical space.
- 7.6 Research from the Church Urban Fund and Theos shows the scale of church-based provision in England. A survey of English adults in 2014 found that 48 per cent of respondents said that they, or a family member, had accessed community-provided (non-statutory) services in the last year. Of those people, 51 per cent said the services had been provided by churches or church-based groups. This would have been equivalent to 10 million people.⁴ In Scotland and England, where there remain national churches and a parish system covering every single household, these denominations continue to have a prominent role in hosting and initiating social action projects.⁵
- 7.7 With the increasing diversity of religions and beliefs, there has been a corresponding rise in the range of initiatives offered amongst different faith and belief groups targeted at their own communities and wider society. Initiatives like Mitzvah Day, Sewa Day and Saddaqa Day, which are based, respectively, in Judaism, Hinduism and Islam, are deliberately inclusive and reflect a growing interest within specific communities to prioritise social action.⁶
- 7.8 That said, a growing number of initiatives are now undertaken in partnership between faith communities. For example, Britain’s first Muslim-led food bank was founded in Nottingham by Himmah, which partnered with the city’s Liberal Synagogue to run a weekly drop-in kitchen.⁷ Food banks run by Muslim charities now exist in a number of other towns and cities. On a larger scale, Citizens UK and Trenfu Cymunedol Cymru draw a growing number of people from different religion- and belief-based institutions into social action. Their partnership honours the distinctive convictions of participants while securing significant policy change from both local and national government and businesses, particularly regarding issues such as payday lending, low pay and the resettlement of refugees.⁸

7.9 Not all social action takes place within formal institutions. Even when it does, the motivations of individual participants may differ from those of the organisation. For example, atheists or agnostics may volunteer in a night shelter for homeless people which is hosted by their local church, simply because that institution has the physical and social capital to sustain the project and is situated in the local community with explicit concern for its welfare. At the same time people of faith have been instrumental in the founding and support of many non-religious charities.

7.10 In this more complicated landscape, several important trends can nonetheless be discerned. Many Christian denominations have been living with numerical decline for some decades. Nonetheless, their physical and social infrastructure continues to play an important role in the provision of social welfare and the promotion of social justice. Many rural churches are now considering the role their buildings can play as a community hub; both rural and urban churches are exploring partnerships with housing associations so land can be harnessed for affordable housing, while also sustaining Christian congregations;⁹ and projects such as the Cathedral Innovation Centres or Volition at Manchester Cathedral (to support the long-term unemployed) are showing how city churches can promote social enterprise.¹⁰ New forms of catechesis (such as the Alpha Course) and church-planting among evangelical churches have led to growth in some Christian congregations (most notably in Greater London).¹¹ This wing of the church in particular has a growing emphasis on social action.¹²

7.11 At the same time, in many of Britain's towns and cities recent immigration has increased the number of people of faith, slowing, or in some cases temporarily reversing, the decline in religious practice. This new diversity has likewise brought different and sometimes distinctive understandings and expectations of the role of religion and belief in public life in ensuring community care services exist. To engage diverse communities in social action, a one-size-fits-all approach that assigns the same motivation and expectation of community initiatives is not practical or effective. An understanding of the different character and rhythm of social action in different communities will be needed in order to make the most of their potential for voluntary action. For example, giving among Muslims increases during Ramadan, but a high proportion of *zakat* donations go abroad.¹³ Among Hindus, giving is a critical aspect of faith and also increases during religious festivals but is not as concentrated as during Ramadan. A submission we received gave an account of the distinctive shape of social action in a Sikh community:

The institution of Langar (serving of free vegetarian food) is a prime example. Guru's Langar started as a means of promoting equality, togetherness and unity; and a sense of shared responsibility for feeding the needy ... Langar is also an opportunity for strangers to feed strangers and in doing so to realise that there really are no strangers in the House of God or the Guru's abode.

7.12 In 2013 the Sikh Federation UK estimated that around 5,000 meals are served to non-Sikhs by Britain's 250 gurdwaras each week. They are performing a function analogous to foodbanks, supporting homeless people, those working in low-paid jobs and students struggling with debt.¹⁴

'to engage diverse communities in social action, a one-size-fits-all approach that assigns the same motivation and expectation of community initiatives is not practical or effective'

7.13 There is nevertheless a common theme amongst people of different religions and beliefs who express their citizenship through demonstrating responsibility toward others who are in need, often regardless of their religion or belief. Current economic pressures have only strengthened this notion of citizenship and the role of grassroots activism and harmony through interreligious engagement in sustaining communities. As a submission explained, 'social action is what will help bind our diverse communities together and contributes

to a sense of well-being, empowerment and connection – and as long as we are not only ever taking care of our own. Initiatives that involve less talk and more action and good deeds, done in a shared fashion between people of all faiths and none, should be encouraged, financed, celebrated and reported routinely as part of secular society's public policy.'

New trends

- 7.14 As social need has grown in a time of austerity and cuts to public services, religion- and belief-based social action movements have been exploring innovative models for sustainability and replication, for example through the Church Urban Fund's Together Grants.¹⁵ In some cases, franchise models have developed (for example, food banks).¹⁶ Religion and belief communities are also beginning to engage with social enterprises and other mutual institutions – one example being the increasing engagement of churches with the credit union movement.¹⁷
- 7.15 The expansion in, and growing diversity of, religion- and belief-based social action has led to an increasing willingness not only to deliver services but also to challenge government policy. 'We make a difference by serving,' an organisation wrote in response to our consultation document, 'i.e. doing what needs to be done, whilst trying to engage local authorities and government to influence policy ... Faith-based organisations are able not just to engage, mobilise and serve at the grassroots, they can also influence, strategise and effect change.' Another wrote that 'faith-based charities and organisations can deliver services (and do), but will not be easily co-opted into government schemas because their pre-existing value-bases will not allow an easy or uncritical relationship with secular power.' A third, quoted at the head of this chapter, said that 'government and the political class need help, and ... the potential of ordinary people of good will, across different belief and political traditions, is much greater than institutional profiles hitherto would suggest. They can help to: re-humanise systems (public and private) that have lost their soul; re-shape the economy by making smart financial choices; reclaim responsibility, community and belonging by strengthening local virtuous institutions; [and] reconnect the sections of a fractured society by bringing estranged parties together.'
- 7.16 Clearly, the dynamism of local initiatives, particularly those associated with religions and beliefs, should not be taken to imply agreement with a transfer of responsibility for welfare from the state to civil society. Often, providers of voluntary services (not least food banks) deeply regret the gaps in governmental provision which make them necessary. Practical action to deal with immediate need may go hand-in-hand with campaign work to challenge the root causes of poverty and other forms of social injustice. In addition to the concept of 'social capital', the concept of 'spiritual capital' is needed, the notion of an ongoing resource for community building that offers not only a theological identity and worshipping tradition, but also a value system, moral vision and a basis for personal hopefulness and faith.¹⁸ Thus conceived, spiritual capital can energise religion and belief communities to act in civil society for the betterment of others. Spiritual capital may involve the desire to transform people holistically as well as improving their material situation. Secular values and traditions may also contribute to spiritual capital.¹⁹

'practical action to deal with immediate need may go hand-in-hand with campaign work to challenge the root causes of poverty and other forms of social injustice'

- 7.17 The success of the Living Wage Campaign throughout the United Kingdom is a testament to the power of such spiritual capital, for it was instigated by an alliance of people in institutions with a range of religions and beliefs, working with schools and trade unions. It has shown the capacity of people of faith to take public action which is deeply animated by their theological identity and worshipping tradition, but can also traverse different

traditions. It is an excellent example of social action going beyond acting as a 'sticking plaster' to challenge the systemic causes of poverty. Further, it demonstrates that in the relationship between the state and civil society the initiative need not always lie with government. Politicians of many different political persuasions, including the First Minister of Scotland and the Mayor of London, have responded to this call from civil society by changing the pay and conditions of those they employ.²⁰

Challenges and concerns

- 7.18 With regard to social action, five key issues have arisen from our consultation. These are: fair treatment of faith-based social projects in funding schemes; going beyond the treatment of social ills towards a critique of injustice and being a catalyst for social change; concern for the divisiveness of religious voices in the public square; a greater understanding of different faith and belief communities; and the relationship between interreligious dialogue and common action for social justice. These issues are discussed further in the following paragraphs.
- 7.19 First, there is both concern and disagreement about what constitutes fair treatment for faith-based social projects, particularly in the area of funding policies. Many of those involved in faith-based social action perceive key potential funders – be they government, charitable trusts or those who administer corporate social responsibility (CSR) budgets in the private sector – as inclined to discriminate unfairly against bodies explicitly inspired by a particular religion or belief. They feel that, even when such bodies are best placed to help those in need, many funding bodies are unwilling to support their work because funding criteria specifically exclude religion and belief groups.²¹ By contrast, a number of respondents had precisely the opposite perspective, and were concerned that government funding in particular should not be given to religious groups, lest they use it to promote their own sectional agendas.²²

We want you to make bricks without straw

Now the mainstream cynical view is that it's a policy emerging from a simple fact: we can no longer afford to pay for a centralised approach to social care, so we have to find ways of helping people care for each other instead. The cost has to be shifted out of the public purse. The question is, shifted where? And churches look a good bet. The trouble is that it comes to us in this form: Churches, faith groups, we want more of what you can contribute but we want it at no cost to us. We want you to make bricks without straw.

from evidence to the commission

- 7.20 A fair treatment of all groups requires careful consideration of the purpose of any funding given, and clear criteria for determining whether specific religion or belief-based groups are best placed to achieve those purposes. If the resources of such groups mean that they are better placed to achieve the goals of the funding body, then such funding should be given. But it is also clearly essential that organisations funded to deliver public goods should not use them as an occasion for seeking converts – this is a reasonable requirement to impose on them in the context of funding from public sources.²³

- 7.21 In this context we welcome the initiative of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society together with FaithAction in developing a Faith Covenant. This offers 'a set of principles that guide engagement, aiming to remove some of the mistrust that exists and to promote open, practical working on all levels'. Among the commitments it involves are a pledge by local authorities 'to welcome the involvement of faith groups in the delivery of services and social action on an equal basis with other groups' and a pledge by faith-based organisations to serve equally all local residents seeking to access the public services they offer, 'without proselytising, irrespective of their religion, gender, marital status, race, ethnic origin, age, sexual orientation, mental capability, long term condition or disability'.²⁴ As of 1 October 2015, five local authorities – all in England – have adopted the covenant.
- 7.22 The second issue is one that applies across the third sector, regardless of whether or not social action is the expression of a particular religion or belief. This issue is how social action can go beyond the mere treatment of social ills and offer both a critique of injustice and a vision of social change. In the 2014 House of Lords debate on religion and belief in public life, it was observed that 'it is striking how, in a liberal democratic society such as ours, religion can easily be co-opted into an ameliorative function, looking after the victims of society but not challenging society itself'.²⁵ This is not a new issue – and, as was seen in previous generations, it has been a key point of debate within and between Christian denominations in Britain. But the same issue arises in today's much more diverse context of religion and belief. A range of voluntary sector organisations – including secular charities such as Oxfam and Save the Children alongside religious groups such as The Salvation Army – have raised serious concerns about the impact of the Lobbying Act on their ability to fulfil this role.²⁶

'religion can easily be co-opted into an ameliorative function, looking after the victims of society but not challenging society itself'

- 7.23 More than twenty years ago a report for the Home Office on voluntary action argued that there is a deep tension between the original aims of charities (be they religion-based or secular), and their increasing role as partners of the state.²⁷ Today, after an increasing emphasis on voluntary action (including religion and belief-based social action) under Labour, coalition and Conservative governments,²⁸ the distinction between service provision and prophetic or philosophical critique is as relevant as ever. However, the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, for the tension between challenging social injustice and alleviating its effects can sometimes be contained within the same institution. Indeed, on issues such as food poverty and homelessness, the role which faith and belief groups already play in service provision gives them greater credibility when they speak out in the public square. Nonetheless, such groups need to consider the dynamics generated by funding sources very carefully so that the prospect of support from government or the private sector does not diminish their ability to speak truth to power.
- 7.24 The third issue which emerged clearly in our hearings was the concern that religious voices in the public square would be divisive. The experience of sectarian conflict among Christians (particularly in Northern Ireland, but on a more modest scale in parts of Scotland and north-west England) and of sectarian violence generates an understandable anxiety about the role of religion in the public square. In order to build a genuinely harmonious and inclusive society, it will be necessary to find ways in which people with different worldviews and religious backgrounds can reason and negotiate effectively with each other in the public square. This was discussed in greater detail in chapter 6. Local initiatives, particularly since the advent of austerity measures in Britain, give some cause for optimism for a common narrative of wanting public services that are effective in addressing poverty and complex need, continued policy support for and investment in community-based action, more vigorous debate about achieving wellbeing across income groups and, more broadly, a balanced and caring society.

- 7.25 The growth of broad-based community organising in different parts of Britain is a striking example of the way in which people of different religions and beliefs can come together for the common good. For example, the Citizens UK alliance brings together both religious and secular groups in a growing number of British cities. A similar approach has been pioneered in parts of Wales by Trenfu Cymunedol Cymru (TCC). These alliances include conservative and liberal congregations of many different faiths, schools, trade unions, tenants associations, and a wide range of other civic groups, for example Q:alliance (an LGBT support and campaigning group in Milton Keynes) and the Royal College of Nursing in Nottingham. The Living Wage is among Citizens UK's most prominent campaigns.
- 7.26 The fourth message that people have repeatedly conveyed to us is the need for a more nuanced understanding of different communities of religion and belief. This echoes our call for greater religion and belief literacy and specifically highlights its place within social action. There is much anxiety in public discourse about 'British values' and how different religious and ethnic communities can be engaged more fully in the task of discerning and promoting a truly *common* good. Chapter 3 deals with the issue of British values at greater length, and recognises that the British story has always involved a lively debate and dialogue about how to build a common life across four distinct nations, and that each nation has always contained a diversity of religion and belief traditions. The challenge of increasing pluralism is to make that debate and dialogue as inclusive and broad-based as possible.

'The British story has always involved a lively debate and dialogue about how to build a common life across four distinct nations, and that each nation has always contained a diversity of religion and belief traditions. The challenge of increasing pluralism is to make that debate and dialogue as inclusive and broad-based as possible.'

- 7.27 While there is currently a great deal of emphasis on the duty of new British citizens to integrate, it is also important to recognise and address financial, linguistic and cultural challenges to settling into British society. At the same time, different ethnic and cultural groups make a substantial practical and social contribution to sustaining wider communities, in part as a reflection of their own beliefs and cultural traditions. Smaller faith groups, however, are sometimes reluctant to engage in social action with others due to a fear of rejection and a lack of confidence. There needs to be a more proactive engagement with these groups.
- 7.28 It is also important to recognise and address the ambiguity of the concept of integration. Religion and belief have often inspired a critique of the existing state of a society. The work of William and Catherine Booth – exposing and challenging the exploitation of workers (and in particular children) in Victorian London – is one of many examples of religion and belief disturbing and challenging the status quo.²⁹ The demand to integrate must not be allowed to silence the prophetic and disturbing voices of those who challenge injustice.
- 7.29 The final issue that came up repeatedly in our hearings and consultations is the relationship between interreligious dialogue and common action for social justice. There is sometimes a perception that these two activities are in competition, and that enthusiasm for social action across faith and belief groups is somehow an alternative to other forms of dialogue and engagement. But experience shows that, far from being competitors, social action and forms of dialogue and engagement are in fact complementary. The building of relationships across different faiths and beliefs requires both practical activity and increased understanding. Acting together on issues of common concern can be a valuable stimulus to dialogue on issues that are sensitive and potentially divisive. Social action does not necessarily reduce substantive disagreement over difficult issues but it can transform the tone of discussions and deliberations.

‘Experience shows that, far from being competitors, social action and forms of dialogue and engagement are in fact complementary. The building of relationships across different faiths and beliefs requires both practical activity and increased understanding.’

7.30 At the same time, there is no single pattern of faith-based social action. The institutional structures of the Abrahamic faiths are often very different from those of the Dharmic religions and the patterns of giving and activism may be distinctive between communities of different faiths and beliefs. To engage and respect different communities in social action requires a higher level of literacy regarding religion and belief from government, and from potential partners in the voluntary sector.

Ways forward

7.31 In the light of the discussions in this chapter, the following specific actions are recommended.

- Those engaged in social action need to consider the balance they wish to strike between providing services and campaigning for social justice. The energy consumed in meeting immediate needs should not be such that systemic injustices remain unchallenged.
- National and regional bodies should train local lay leaders and congregations how to decide on an appropriate division of labour.
- Organisations rooted in a particular religion or belief should become more proactive in identifying areas of social need where they can engage in common action across deep difference, and funding bodies should encourage social action which achieves this goal wherever it is possible.
- National government should review the provisions of the Lobbying Act, to ensure that charities working for social justice are not prevented from campaigning as well as meeting needs.
- There needs to be an increase in training in religion and belief literacy for all those engaging with the voluntary sector in local and national government.
- Training is particularly needed that enables organisations to engage more effectively with non-Abrahamic religion and belief groups, rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all model of religious engagement in social action.
- The Faith Covenant (paragraph 7.21) should be more widely known and adopted.
- More generally, local and national government should work together with religion and belief groups to reach a common understanding of the distinction between appropriate ways of sharing the motivations for faith-based social action and inappropriate seeking of converts, and at the same time of the importance of recognising the spiritual needs of vulnerable people.
- Charitable trusts and CSR (corporate social responsibility) bodies should work with faith-based charities positioned to address particular social issues. If a religion- or belief-based organisation is best placed to deliver a social good, then it should not be disadvantaged in applying for funding to do so, assuming its services are not exclusive or aimed at seeking converts.

- 1 In December 2014 there were 32,735 faith-based charities registered with the Charity Commission, representing nearly 1 in 5 of all charities (in addition to many church charities that are exempt from standard Charity Commission regulations). Most were small-medium sized, forming 33 per cent of all charities within the £100,000 to £500,000 income bracket. The researchers define a faith-based organisation as 'one that embodies some form of religious belief, although this can manifest itself in the founding history, mission, governance or staff'. Hargrave and Nicholls (2014), pp. 1–2.
- 2 The types of community development activities that religion and belief groups are involved in can be organised into at least 48 categories. For a breakdown of those activities in each English region, see Dinham (2007). For further discussion see Dinham (2009), pp. 119–161.
- 3 The Church of England had a Board of Social Responsibility until 2003, when it was merged into a wider body focused on 'Mission and Public Affairs'. The Church of Scotland had a 'Church and Nation Committee of the Church of Scotland' that merged into a wider 'Church and Society' committee in 2005.
- 4 Bickley (2014), pp. 10, 58.
- 5 In a 2014 survey of 1,812 Anglican clergy, over 90 per cent said that their parish was working to address at least one social issue in the local area, either through the provision of organised activities or informal support. Eckley and Sefton (2015), p. 6.
- 6 See <http://www.mitzvahday.org.uk/>, <http://www.sewaday.org/>, <http://www.mysadaqaday.org/>. See also the Faith, Khidmah and Citizenship campaign, which is advocating civic action among Muslims – An-Nisa and Radical Middle Way (2012).
- 7 See <http://www.himmah.org> and <http://www.tauheedulcharity.org/foodbanks/>.
- 8 See <http://citizensuk.org> and <http://www.tcc-wales.org.uk/>.
- 9 Thorlby and Gelder (2015). For a discussion of housing associations established by Jews and Muslims, see Flint (2010).
- 10 See <http://www.cathedralinnovationcentre.com/> and <http://www.manchestercathedral.org/volunteering/volition>.
- 11 For analysis of church growth in London, see Jackson and Piggot (2010).
- 12 See, for example, Evangelical Alliance (2014).
- 13 JustGiving (2013).
- 14 Badshah (2013).
- 15 See <https://www.cuf.org.uk/how-we-help/cuf-funding/together-grants>.
- 16 The proportion of churches involved in running food banks doubled from 33 per cent in 2011 to 55 per cent in 2014. See Eckley and Sefton (2015), p. 12.
- 17 Eckley and Sefton (2015), p. 14–15. For further discussion of these and other services offered by religion and belief groups to combat poverty, see Jawad (2012), pp. 187–204.
- 18 Baker and Skinner (2006), p. 4.
- 19 Baker and Skinner (2006), pp. 11–13; Baker and Miles-Watson (2008).
- 20 See <http://www.livingwage.org.uk/>.
- 21 A 2011 survey of members of different religious organisations found that 26 per cent said they had experienced unfair treatment on the basis of religion in the area of funding, compared to 33 per cent in 2000. A number reported being excluded from applying for funding because they were religious organisations – in 2000 the issue was raised mainly by Christian groups but in 2011 it was reported by participants from a number of different religious groups. See Weller et al (2013), pp. 163–171.
- 22 Such concerns were also expressed by respondents to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's call for evidence about experiences of religion or belief in the workplace. See Mitchell and Beninger, with Donald and Howard (2015), pp. 14, 109–111.
- 23 For a discussion about proselytism among faith-based organisations, see Bickley (2015).
- 24 All Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society (2014), pp. 10–11.
- 25 Speech by Lord Parekh. See House of Lords Debate (2014), column 1015.
- 26 More fully, the Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act, 2014. See Morris (2015).
- 27 Knight (1993).
- 28 See DeHanas, O'Toole and Meer (2013).
- 29 See Clifton et al (2015).

8. LAW

To help us live with our differences

'There is much to be grateful for and proud of in the legal traditions of the United Kingdom. But it is important to ask whether the law is doing all it can to help us live with our differences.'

'The balance currently struck between freedom of conscience and the right to be free of discrimination is satisfactory and cannot be changed without undermining anti-discrimination more broadly.'

From responses to the commission's consultation paper

Background and context

- 8.1 The law, it has been said, cannot change people's hearts and minds. It can, however, restrain the heartless and can encourage the mindless to have due regard for matters they might otherwise neglect. It does this by making requirements and prohibitions, and by declaring both by implication and in so many words what society as a whole stands for, and will not stand for. The aim is that people may live peaceably with each other and, at best, may not only tolerate difference but also positively and happily benefit from it. Law is necessary, and to emphasise its essential and final importance for the common good, this chapter comes last in our report. Law is not, however, sufficient. That is why vital matters of heart and mind that complement law, and support it and are supported by it, have been considered first in this report – matters such as vision, education, the media, dialogue, social action.

'the aim is that people may live peaceably with each other and, at best, may not only tolerate difference but also positively and happily benefit from it'

- 8.2 Law relating to differences of religion and belief has been developing in the UK for many centuries and no doubt will continue to develop into the future. A landmark in the past was the Act of Toleration 1689. Much more recently significant landmarks have included the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010. The former introduces a positive right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; the latter, applying to England, Scotland and Wales only, prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion or belief in the same way that it does for characteristics such as age, disability, gender, race and sexual orientation.¹ They are thus complementary to each other. Case law in relation to them has added further definition to the rights and duties which they entail. Developments in England, Scotland and Wales have also been influenced and informed by legislation in Northern Ireland, and there have been relevant changes in criminal law to do with hate-crime, incitement, counter-terrorism and freedom of expression. The UK has in consequence a well-developed legal framework protecting the rights of individuals to express and practise religion and belief.

- 8.3 The terms *religion* and *belief* are defined in the Equality Act very broadly to include any religion; any religious or philosophical belief; a lack of religion; and a lack of belief. The Act prohibits direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation in relation to particular areas, especially employment, education, goods and services, and premises.² Direct discrimination occurs where, because of a protected characteristic such as religion or belief, A treats B less favourably than they treat or would treat others. Indirect discrimination occurs where an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice (PCP) puts someone with a protected characteristic at a disadvantage compared with others who do not have that characteristic, and where applying a PCP cannot be objectively justified. The key difference between direct and indirect discrimination, therefore, is that indirect discrimination can sometimes be justified, for example by concerns about health and safety, but that direct discrimination can usually never be justified,³ the only defence open to respondents being to prove that no discrimination occurred. Almost all successful religion or belief cases have so far involved allegations of indirect discrimination not direct discrimination.⁴

Time off

During my time as a teacher, I did, with the help of my teaching-union, enter into a two-year dispute with my local council over time off with pay for Jewish Holy Days ... Technically I "won" my case: I was allowed to take off days, with pay, on which I was explicitly forbidden under Jewish Law to work. However, it was something of a pyrrhic victory in terms of the time and effort it cost me.

from evidence to the commission

- 8.4 A further important feature of the Equality Act 2010 is that it introduced a single general public sector equality duty (PSED). This requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by the Act, b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not share it and c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant characteristic and persons who do not share it.⁵ The concept of due regard has been clarified through case law.⁶ In colloquial and non-technical language the three needs are to treat everyone the same (eliminate direct and indirect discrimination), to treat everyone differently in cases where differences are relevant (advance equality of opportunity) and to help them get on amicably with each other (foster good relations). These three needs may appear at first sight to be inconsistent with each other. At best, however, they complement and reinforce each other. There is a creative tension between them, not a competition or conflict.
- 8.5 The Equality Act includes exceptions relating to religion or belief in employment and service delivery. The employment exception is in connection with a narrow set of roles which are essentially concerned with the promotion and representation of a religion, for example the role of a religious minister.⁷ The goods and services exception allows a religion or belief organisation to restrict the delivery of its goods and services on grounds of religion or belief in certain specified circumstances. For example, it permits ministers of religion to provide a service only to persons of one sex, or separate services to people of each sex, if this is necessary to comply with the doctrines of the religion or to avoid conflict with strongly held convictions of a number of the religion's followers.⁸
- 8.6 Other relevant pieces of legislation include the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as amended by the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 and the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012; the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006; the Counter-Terrorism Act 2008; and the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015. The

Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as amended created specific offences of racially and religiously aggravated crime based on the offences of wounding, assault, damage, harassment, threatening or abusive behaviour and stalking; when aggravated by hatred these offences carry higher maximum penalties than their basic offence equivalents. The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006 created new offences of stirring up religious hatred.⁹ Counter-terrorism legislation has implications in practice for people of certain religious backgrounds, particularly at the present time people of Muslim background, and for how they are seen by others. A range of challenges, anxieties and concerns relating to these various pieces of legislation was put to us in the consultation exercise we conducted and several of these are considered below. In particular there are discussions in the following paragraphs of four themes: the balancing of rights, and in this connection the case for and against introducing into UK law the concept of reasonable accommodation; the role of minority religious tribunals and the need to protect women; anomalies in the way the law deals with the overlap of race and religion as legal categories; and unintended consequences of the ways in which counter-terrorism legislation is implemented.

'religion, particularly the Christian religion, is being trumped within a hierarchy of rights that places it at or near the bottom'

Challenges and concerns

The balancing of rights

- 8.7 There have been several high-profile legal cases in which there was apparently a conflict between competing equality strands, particularly between the sexual orientation strand on the one hand and the religion or belief strand on the other. Some of those who wrote to us perceived that these cases show or suggest that religion, particularly the Christian religion, is being trumped within a hierarchy of rights that places it at or near the bottom. Their consequent distress was of a piece with their sense that Christianity worldwide is under attack and is retreating. 'Does Britain', we had asked, 'show equal respect for religious and non-religious beliefs and identities?' 'Sadly,' replied someone, 'I'd have to say "No"'. Their letter continued:

This is especially poignant when one considers the vital contribution of the Christian faith to most of what has been good and admirable in British history and society. Christian civilisation shines in stark contrast to atheism or humanism, to both of which should be attributed the horrific cruelties and tyrannies of communist regimes ... Similarly, societies dominated by Islam and Hinduism are conspicuous for backwardness, violence, and repression of women ... In British society there is now clear evidence of positive discrimination against Christians and in favour of homosexuals ... There can seldom have been so many glaring instances of 'good' being called 'evil', and vice versa, or of new laws resulting in manifest injustice.

- 8.8 These perceptions and feelings were also communicated by several other respondents. In greater numbers, anxieties about new legislation were expressed in response to a large-scale call for evidence by the Equality and Human Rights Commission.¹⁰ In contrast, other respondents to the commission were fearful that hard-won rights to gender equality and LGBT equality are in danger of being trumped by religious considerations. The issue, they insisted, is not about whether certain rights are more worthy of respect than others, but about how rights of equal importance can and should be balanced with each other. The European Court of Human Rights, through Article 9(2) of the European Convention on Human Rights, has ruled that adverse effects which disproportionately impact on the rights of others are a legitimate rationale for the state to constrain the right of an individual to express their religion.¹¹ There can be no accommodation of religion or belief, European and UK case law has established, if this would result in disproportionately discriminating against others on

grounds such as race, gender, disability or sexual orientation, and of course religion or belief.¹² The principal arguments for this are that an exemption for genuine religious conviction would be open to abuse and would involve the courts in impossible determinations of motive.

- 8.9 Although religion or belief legal cases have received extensive media coverage in recent years there have been relatively few employment tribunal (ET) cases related to religion or belief when compared with other equality strands. For example, from April 2013 to March 2014 there were 584 claims of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief accepted by ETs compared with 13,722 claims for sex discrimination, 5,196 for disability discrimination and 3,064 for race discrimination. As with all types of ET case, very few religion or belief claims (only about three per cent) are successful at hearing.¹³ It is in any case important to emphasise that protection is not only for minority religions or those of no religion. The case of *Eweida v. British Airways plc*, for example, established that Christians who want to wear a religious symbol may do so in the workplace, as may members of other faiths, subject to balancing criteria such as business necessity or health and safety. As a result, it is now the case that religious symbols may generally be worn in the workplace. Disputes, though, are likely to continue. The size of a symbol, for example, and whether it might be offensive or provocative to others, is still debated.¹⁴
- 8.10 To facilitate the balancing of rights, as mentioned earlier the Equality Act contains a range of religious exceptions or exemptions. It has been suggested that, in addition, a duty of reasonable accommodation of religion or belief by employers should be introduced in Britain, as in the US and Canada. Such a duty would be analogous to the duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees. At present if someone wishes their religion or belief to be recognised by their employer they have to argue that non-recognition constitutes indirect discrimination. This involves making a negative claim of discrimination rather than claiming a positive right, and they have to show that a group is disadvantaged, not just an individual. It would be simpler and more appropriate, the argument runs, if there was a right to reasonable accommodation.¹⁵ A counter argument is that the protection provided by a duty of accommodation would not materially differ from that which is currently provided by the requirements prohibiting indirect discrimination. But whether using either model, the question for a court would be whether it is proportionate and reasonable, in each particular case, to refuse to accommodate the wishes of a religious employee. The outcome of such an assessment would depend more on the standard of review applied than on the model used.¹⁶
- 8.11 A third possible model would involve creating a right to request accommodation of religion or belief in the workplace, analogous to the current right to request flexible working. In this instance too, however, this might not make a material difference in the law. For some employees such a right would nevertheless be easier to access than the other models, and would be less confrontational – hence, in one of the word's senses, more reasonable. Also, in many workplaces it would formalise local arrangements and agreements that are already in place and working well.¹⁷

'right to request accommodation of religion or belief in the workplace, analogous to the current right to request flexible working'

Religious tribunals and the rights of women

- 8.12 A number of respondents to our consultation referred to religious alternative dispute resolution (ADR) bodies. In many submissions, these tribunals and councils, particularly those associated with Islam and Judaism, were seen negatively or as having no place in British society. We also found a great deal of misunderstanding surrounding such religious tribunals and councils, and are aware there is considerable concern about shari'a

councils among the general public, particularly in relation to gender equality. These issues have been raised in the House of Lords,¹⁸ and the government has stated that it will commission an independent review of how shari'a councils function.¹⁹

- 8.13 Religious ADR bodies provide community-based services in the UK for Jews and Muslims as well as for Catholics. Muslim religious tribunals vary, ranging from more established councils such as the one attached to Birmingham Central Mosque through to more informal institutions.²⁰ There is also evidence that other groups utilise alternative forms of dispute resolution which similarly may make decisions affecting their members, often in informal contexts.²¹ These community-based institutions have become a topic of interest in the context of post 9/11 and 7/7 discussions about Islam and law. They have also become more important because of increased migration, demographic change and cultural diversity. The decisions of religious tribunals, apart from those of the courts of the Church of England, are not treated as part of the law of England and Wales, or of Scotland or Northern Ireland.

Safely atheist, single and female

I believe that I am as free as it is possible to be, to work, make my own decisions and bring up my children. I have no constraints of faith; I have commitments to values which I have explored throughout my life and continue to examine. These freedoms are part of what being British means to me and they have nothing to do with religion – or everything, as religious tolerance, a secular legal system and political freedom are essential for people to be safely atheist, single and female.

from evidence to the commission

- 8.14 Muslim and Jewish religious tribunals make decisions in relation to areas such as marriage, divorce and other family disputes or inheritance. The London Beth Din (Court of the Chief Rabbi), for example, oversees religious divorces (the Get), but in order to dissolve the marriage it is necessary for one of the spouses to obtain a decree absolute in the family court. Either party can apply to the court not to make the decree nisi absolute until the Get has been granted.²² Muslim shari'a councils also make decisions on such family matters. In London, for example, the Islamic Sharia Council offers dispute resolution style counselling and mediation for married couples, facilitates Islamic divorces (most commonly the talaq and the khula) and also offers services relating to civil issues, including, for example, insurance and loans. Decisions on religious or family matters made by religious tribunals are not enforceable in the state courts of the UK, though the involved parties may voluntarily choose to follow them.²³ It has been suggested however that community or familial pressure may lead some people to engage in the processes offered by the tribunals when they may not otherwise have wished to.²⁴
- 8.15 Some religious tribunals, including the London Beth Din and the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal, also offer arbitration services governed by the Arbitration Act 1996 (extending to England, Wales and Northern Ireland). Parties wishing to resolve civil disputes according to a particular religion's legal norms can form a written agreement to begin arbitration, and can request a religious tribunal to act as the arbitrator. The parties have the power to specify the terms of the arbitration procedure, to which they must agree at the outset. If they agree to accept the tribunal's decisions as binding, any awards made by the arbitrators are recognised by and are enforceable in state courts.²⁵
- 8.16 There is a range of different kinds of Batei Din and shari'a councils in the UK, each operating under its own separate rules of procedure and practice, and recourse to them is not necessarily restricted to members of a particular religion.²⁶

- 8.17 One issue raised in the Islamic Sharia Council's evidence to the commission concerned the performing of a Muslim marriage ceremony (the Nikah). In the absence of a civil marriage ceremony performed by a marriage registrar, a Nikah conducted in the UK is not recognised within the UK as a valid marriage. The absence of a registered civil marriage in addition to the Nikah ceremony has led to a number of Muslim women, after a Muslim divorce, being deprived of any recourse to the matrimonial financial legislation available in the UK, and being therefore treated as having been in a state of cohabitation with their partner. This has created serious injustice for Muslim women. It was considered by a Ministry of Justice working group, and led to a campaign by the National Register Office to do more to protect the interests of such women. The Islamic Sharia Council also referred to two recent cases in which the English family court had withheld the decree absolute until the husband had pronounced talaq to his wife or until the issue of dower had been resolved. This co-operation between the Sharia Council and the family courts is a helpful development.

Anomalies in dealing with the race and religion overlap

- 8.18 Members of minority groups and communities, including religious groups and communities, frequently have to develop and define their identity in a context of being discriminated against and excluded, and of being the targets of hate crimes and demeaning stereotypes. This can, in consequence, prevent them from seeing themselves as belonging fully to the ongoing national story. This has been the experience of Jews, Catholics and Sikhs in the past in Britain, and of atheists and agnostics. In certain places and at certain times it still is. For Jews and Sikhs, however, the law now has a significant declaratory effect, for it clearly signals that crimes aggravated by animosity towards them will be more severely dealt with than the same crimes committed against others. The same level of declaratory protection is not, however, available with regard to crimes aggravated by animosity towards other religions. This anomaly is unjust and needs to be rectified. At present, it is Muslims who are in practice most seriously affected by it. But the reason for rectifying it is a matter of general principle, not of who happens currently to be most affected by it in practice.

'At present, it is Muslims who are in practice most seriously affected by it. But the reason for rectifying it is a matter of general principle, not of who happens currently to be most affected by it in practice.'

- 8.19 Hate crimes against Muslims operate in much the same way as antisemitic or anti-Sikh hate crimes – they are often perpetrated by the same people, usually involve the same kinds of violence and abusive and threatening language, are condoned or encouraged in the same milieu of onlookers and bystanders, inflict the same kinds of bodily harm, do the same kinds of criminal damage to property and sacred places, and have the same demoralising intimidating and traumatic effects on victims, and on the victims' families and communities.²⁷ Yet incitement to anti-Muslim hate crime is more difficult to prosecute than incitement to antisemitic or anti-Sikh hate crime. This is a further anomaly that needs to be rectified. This is because Jews and Sikhs are protected under the incitement to racial hatred provisions in Part III of the Public Order Act 1986, whereas Muslims are not. Muslims may, it is true, seek protection under the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006; but the provisions under this are significantly weaker than those which apply under the Public Order Act. Also, there is a freedom of expression defence in the 2006 provisions which makes it more difficult to prosecute for inciting religious hatred than it is for inciting racial hatred.²⁸ A further example of the disparity in protection is to do with harassment. Jews and Sikhs are protected against harassment in the provision of goods and services (on the grounds of race), but members of other religion or belief groups are not.²⁹

- 8.20 The effects of anomalies in legal protection are exacerbated if those who feel aggrieved are also the subject of demeaning stereotypes in the media and feel they are over-policed and under-protected on the streets and in society more generally. Again, this is essentially a matter of principle but the obvious example in current practice relates to British Muslims, because their sense of belonging to Britain is affected not only by negative stereotypes in the media but also by their experiences of policing under counter-terrorism legislation. The net result of such experiences is a feeling amongst British Muslims that they are a suspect community, as Irish Catholic people in Britain during the Troubles felt, and consequently there is a sense of alienation from, and grievance towards, mainstream British society.³⁰ The recently introduced requirement that all police should collect statistics on incidents perceived to be anti-Muslim is a welcome development. It is not, however, a substitute for removing the injustice that Muslims do not have as much protection against hate-crime as do the members of certain other religions.³¹
- 8.21 A review of the legal concepts of race and ethnic origin could also relevantly consider caste discrimination. The current position on this is that the Equality Act includes a provision for the introduction of secondary legislation as soon as the evidence has been properly assessed.³² An assessment was undertaken by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research in 2010, and this recommended that the legal definition of race should be extended to include caste in order to provide further and more explicit protection.³³ In April 2013 the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act converted the existing power in the Equality Act into a duty to include caste as an aspect of race. In July of that year the government set out a timetable for introducing legislation on caste discrimination by the summer of 2015. This deadline has in the event not been met, mainly due to delays in undertaking further research and consultation. In the meantime, however, case law suggests that, depending on the specific circumstances of an individual case, caste-based discrimination may already be unlawful under existing law, namely through the reference to the ethnic origin element in the definition of race, though not necessarily so.³⁴ Influential sections of some faith communities, however, maintain that more research and consultation is still required before the law on caste discrimination is put into effect. Other sections are disappointed and frustrated by the delay.

Unintended consequences of counter-terrorism legislation

- 8.22 Counter-terrorism legislation and strategies are a proper responsibility for all governments and have rightly been a priority in Britain and other western countries since the outrages in New York (2001), Madrid (2004) and London (2005). More recently, major atrocities have included murders in Woolwich (2013), Paris (2015) and Tunisia (2015). Governments have a clear responsibility to prevent such outrages. Also, as with the whole spectrum of crime and disorder, they have leadership tasks in relation to fear of terrorism, and to fostering security not only as objective fact but also as subjective feeling. According to Pew Research Center, between 2011 and 2015 the percentage saying they are very concerned about Islam-related extremism in their country increased by 38 percentage points in France, 29 points in Spain, 21 points in the United Kingdom, 20 points in Germany and 17 points in the United States.³⁵ Within the overall pattern of public opinion in Britain it has been found that fear of Islam-related terrorism is higher amongst older people and people living outside London, and in particular parts of the electorate.³⁶

‘within the overall pattern of public opinion in Britain it has been found that fear of Islam-related terrorism is higher amongst older people and people living outside London, and in particular parts of the electorate’

- 8.23 The ways in which anti-terrorism policies operate in practice can have, however, unintended consequences. In particular, significant numbers of citizens may come to feel they are viewed as Other; namely as people who do not truly belong and cannot be trusted, 'them' rather than 'us', suspects or potential suspects, not ordinary citizens with the same values as everyone else. Counter-terrorism policies and measures may then not only fail to achieve their objectives but may actually make matters worse, such that both terrorism and the fear of terrorism increase, and both security and sense of security are diminished.³⁷ At the present time it is Muslim communities in Britain that are most directly and obviously affected. All people, however, are of course affected by increases in fear and feelings of insecurity, as also all people in a society are affected by the ways in which majorities and minorities see and approach each other.

'all people, however, are of course affected by increases in fear and feelings of insecurity, as also all people in a society are affected by the ways in which majorities and minorities see and approach each other'

- 8.24 To decrease the danger of unintended harmful consequences in counter-terrorism measures against Islam-related terrorism, the following five points need to be carefully considered.
- The government needs to engage with a wide range of academic theory, research and scholarship about the nature and causes of terrorism. Amongst other things, this means it should encourage and promote, not seek to limit, freedom of enquiry, speech and expression, and should not loosely use words and concepts which scholarship shows to be controversial and unclear. Such words and concepts include 'ideology', 'radicalisation', 'extremism' and 'Islamism'.³⁸
 - The government needs to meet and engage with a wide range of Muslim groups and organisations, and to show that it understands, even if it does not agree with, the views about the nature and causes of terrorism that they hold. It cannot otherwise gain the trust and confidence of significant opinion leaders, and therefore cannot rely on their support and assistance. Their support and assistance are essential, however, if counter-terrorism strategies are to be successful. In its selection of organisations with which to engage the government must guard against the perception that it is operating with a simplistic good Muslims/bad Muslims distinction, or between 'mainstream moderates' and 'violent or non-violent extremists'.
 - There is no causal or inevitable link between conservative or orthodox theological and moral views on the one hand and propensity to violent and criminal behaviour on the other. Nor, more fundamentally, is there a simple, one-way causal link between a worldview, ideology or narrative on the one hand and specific actions and behaviours on the other.³⁹
 - There is no simplistic us/them distinction or clash between western or Enlightenment values on the one hand and the values of other cultures, countries and civilisations on the other; nor between Christian values and those of other religions.
 - Political leaders should seek not only to promote debate and deliberation about the causes of terrorism but also to challenge misunderstandings and negative stereotypes in the population at large and in mass-circulation newspapers – they have a duty to lead public opinion, and not only to reduce fear and insecurity in the majority population but also to give principled reassurance and moral support to groups and communities which feel vulnerable to violence or discrimination.
- 8.25 These concerns were well summarised in the September 2015 report of Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation. The report listed 15 issues raised by the government's new measures on countering extremism

and commented that the issues matter because ‘they concern the scope of UK discrimination, hate speech and public order laws, the limits that the state may place on some of our most basic freedoms, the proper limits of surveillance, and the acceptability of imposing suppressive measures without the protections of the criminal law’. The report then issued the very important warning that ‘if the wrong decisions are taken, the new law risks provoking a backlash in affected communities, hardening perceptions of an illiberal or Islamophobic approach, alienating those whose integration into British society is already fragile and playing into the hands of those who, by peddling a grievance agenda, seek to drive people further towards extremism and terrorism’.⁴⁰ There is a severe danger, to put the same point in different words, that the vision of a society at ease with itself, sketched at the start of chapter 3 of this report, and frequently referred to throughout the following chapters, will be harmed not helped by government action. It could be harder not easier, as a consequence of government action, for the citizens of the UK to live with their differences. It is essential that forthcoming proposals on countering extremism should be scrutinised with the maximum possible care and amended accordingly if appropriate, and that subsequent operations when they are enacted should be monitored with a very high degree of diligence.

A religiously astute society

Religious questions will continue to come before the courts in the UK. The issue is not so much one of law... The difficulty is rather one of application. Underpinning all of these cases, however, is the significance of religion in society and the importance of an indefinite article having religiously astute society.

from evidence to the commission

Ways forward

Non-discrimination and reasonable accommodation

- 8.26 We do not recommend any immediate changes in the law with regards to freedom of religion or belief or to discrimination on grounds of religion or belief. However, we do recommend that an appropriate body, for example the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) should consider publishing guidance to encourage dialogue, mediation and dispute resolution where the manifestation of religion or belief in public life impacts or conflicts with the freedoms and rights of others.

Minority religious tribunals and courts

- 8.27 Further academic research is required to identify which communities, other than Christians, Jews and Muslims, have religion-based law or tribunals. More needs to be known about the experience and impact of tribunal decisions on women users, and about the impact of state policies on the procedures and substantive rules of these tribunals. Future policy research could focus on identifying areas where the tribunals might work to support the civil law while protecting religious identity.
- 8.28 The Ministry of Justice should examine issues arising from formal and informal religious tribunals with a view to:
- disseminating best practice – particularly with regard to good practice structures and processes and the promotion of gender equality

- determining whether marriages between members of minority religious groups should be required, first or simultaneously, to be registered according to English law
- determining whether all religious tribunals addressing civil disputes should be required to have structures and processes compatible with arbitration legislation.

The concept of ethnicity

- 8.29 Where different communities have similar experiences they should expect to be treated in the same way by the law. Therefore there needs to be a better understanding of how race, ethnicity and religion overlap, and what this means in practice for different communities. British Sikh communities, for example, have consistently argued that they are recognised as an ethnic group in law but are denied this status in ethnic monitoring, which has helped to hide many of the socio-economic issues Sikh communities face and that need addressing with public resources.⁴¹ We recommend that an appropriate body, for example the Equality and Human Rights Commission or the Law Commission, should review how the categories of race, ethnicity and religion interact in practice and whether, as argued in this chapter, there are certain unjust anomalies which must be recognised and addressed.
- 8.30 A focused piece of policy work should be carried out revisiting the race, ethnic and religious categories created in the 1970s and 1980s and exploring how they could be made more relevant, meaningful and fair in the light of more recent experience. Amongst other things, such a review should look at the policy framework in Australia, which explicitly uses the legal category of 'ethno-religious'.
- 8.31 In cases where government wishes to discuss or amend legislation that directly affects communities of religion or belief, it should be adopted as a principle that government ensures that credible academic research is used as a basis for its proposals and that there is early consultation with communities which could be most affected. Working with faith communities may require public officials to undergo specific training to ensure that they have knowledge of the religious beliefs and practices of the communities they serve. They should also be equipped to design policies that accommodate religion and belief in ways that have due regard for the requirements of the public sector equality duty (PSED).

Counter-terrorism legislation

- 8.32 In framing counter-terrorism legislation, the government should seek to promote, not limit, freedom of enquiry, speech and expression, and should engage with a wide range of affected groups, including those with which it disagrees, and also with academic research. It should lead public opinion by challenging negative stereotyping and by speaking out in support of groups that may otherwise feel vulnerable and excluded.

¹ See Equality Act (2010), s.217. The full act applies in England and Wales. In Scotland, s.190 and Part 15 do not apply. The act does not apply to Northern Ireland apart from s.82, s.105(3) and (4), and s.199.

² Donald with Bennett and Leach (2012), pp. 1, 45. There are a number of exceptions – see paragraph 8.5. Harassment on grounds of religion or belief is only prohibited in relation to employment, not in relation to the provision of goods and services. See Equality Act (2010), s.29(8).

³ Exceptions in domestic and EU law include cases where a religion or belief is considered to constitute an occupational requirement of a particular job, and in cases of age discrimination and some forms of disability discrimination. Edge and Vickers (2015), pp. 26, 31.

⁴ For further explanation of direct and indirect discrimination, see Donald with Bennett and Leach (2012), pp. 45–46; Edge and Vickers (2015), p.30–38.

⁵ Equality Act (2010), s.149. See also Donald with Bennett and Leach (2012), pp. 175–181.

⁶ In *R. (Brown) v. Secretary of State for Work and Pensions* [2008] EWHC 3158 the court clarified what a public body must do in order to fulfil the requirement to have due regard to the aims of the public sector equality duty. These 'Brown' principles have been accepted by courts in subsequent cases. See further Equality and Human Rights Commission (2014), pp. 19–22.

- 7 Equality Act 2010, Schedule 9, s.2–3. Special rules concerning discrimination on grounds of religion or belief apply to the employment of teachers in schools with a religious ethos. See Edge and Vickers (2015), pp. 38–39, 43–45.
- 8 Equality Act (2010), Schedule 3, s.29; Schedule 23, s.2. See also Edge and Vickers (2015), pp. 46–47.
- 9 Crime and Disorder Act (1998), s.29–32; Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006). See Sandberg (2011), pp. 142–145.
- 10 Mitchell and Beninger; with Donald and Howard (2015).
- 11 Edge and Vickers (2015), pp. 23–26, 29–30.
- 12 In the domestic courts see, for example, *Bull and Bull v Hall and Preddy* [2013], *London Borough of Islington v Ladele* [2009] and *McFarlane v Relate Avon Ltd* [2010]. At European level, see the judgments in *Ladele* and *McFarlane* in *Eweida and Others v the United Kingdom* [2013].
- 13 Catto and Perfect (2015), p. 137. For detailed discussion of discrimination on grounds of religion or belief in the UK, see Weller et al (2013) and Weller (2011).
- 14 The case of Nadia Eweida was concluded in the European Court of Human Rights in *Eweida and Others v the United Kingdom* [2013], along with three other UK cases involving issues related to religion in the workplace. For further discussion see, for example, McCrea (2014) and Edge and Vickers (2015).
- 15 See, for example, Gibson (2013).
- 16 Edge and Vickers (2015), pp. 51–52.
- 17 Edge and Vickers (2015), pp. 55–56.
- 18 See the debate on the Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill. House of Lords Debate (2015).
- 19 Home Office (2015), p. 19.
- 20 Malik (2012), p. 17.
- 21 For example, Roma communities utilise internal forms of conflict resolution based on customary legal traditions. Malik (2012), p. 19. See Malik for a discussion of ‘minority legal orders’, including an evaluation of the various approaches that the government could take towards them.
- 22 As set out in the Matrimonial Causes Act (1973) s.10A, as amended by the Divorce (Religious Marriages) Act 2002. The family court’s withholding of the decree absolute until the Get has been granted can help women in situations where their husbands have refused to grant them a religious divorce. See further Sandberg (2011), pp. 183–184.
- 23 The Centre for Social Cohesion (2009), p. 2; Malik (2012), p. 17.
- 24 House of Lords Debate (2015).
- 25 In Scotland the Arbitration (Scotland) Act 2010 applies. Civil courts will not enforce a decision where there is a ‘public policy which requires this court not to’ – see *Kohn v Wagschal and others* [2007], para. 18. For further discussion see Sandberg (2011), pp. 184–188.
- 26 For example, there is evidence that non-Muslims sometimes use Muslim religious arbitration as a way to resolve commercial disputes quickly and cheaply. Malik (2012), p. 10, 17–18.
- 27 Tell MAMA recorded 584 verified anti-Muslim incidents in the UK between March 2014 and February 2015. The Community Security Trust recorded 1,168 antisemitic incidents in the UK in 2014. In London, 818 Islamophobic and 483 antisemitic offences were recorded by the Metropolitan Police between September 2014 and September 2015 – increases of 64 per cent and 62 per cent respectively on the previous year. See Littler and Feldman (2015); Community Security Trust (2015); <http://www.met.police.uk/crimefigures/#>.
- 28 For the freedom of expression defence, see Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006), s.29]. The guidance issued by the Crown Prosecution Service explains that ‘using abusive or insulting behaviour intended to stir up religious hatred does not constitute an offence, nor does using threatening words likely to stir up religious hatred.’ http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/p_to_r/racist_and_religious_crime/.
- 29 Equality Act (2010), s.29(8); see chapter 8: note 2.
- 30 Hickman et al (2012); Choudhury and Fenwick (2010).
- 31 Home Office (2015), p. 34. See also Allen (2015).
- 32 Equality Act (2010), s.9(5).
- 33 Metcalf and Rolfe (2010), p. 65.
- 34 See, for example, *Tirkey v Chandhok & Another* [2015]. For detailed discussion see Pyper (2015) and Dhanda et al (2014).
- 35 Poushter (2015), p. 2.
- 36 A 2014 survey of 2,083 British adults found that 79 per cent of respondents deemed Islamic terrorism to pose an important threat to the country (rising to over 90 per cent of Conservative and UKIP supporters and those over age 60). Forty-six per cent of respondents thought the threat posed was critical. YouGov (2014).
- 37 See, for example, Mohammed (2015); Hamid (2015).
- 38 See Harris, Bisset and Weller (2015).
- 39 For reviews of various proposed models of radicalisation, which highlight the multiplicity of factors that can be involved, see, for example, Francis (2012); Christmann (2012); King and Taylor (2011). The Radicalisation Research website produces and collates research on these issues, <http://www.radicalisationresearch.org/>.
- 40 Anderson (2015), p. 65.
- 41 See, for example, The Sikh Network (2015), pp. 7–8.

9. WAYS FORWARD

Checklist of next steps

This last chapter is a checklist of the recommendations made in chapters 3-8. In each instance there is cross-reference to the paragraph where a recommendation is first introduced and explained.

VISION (chapter 3)

1. **Shared values**

A national conversation should be launched across the UK by leaders of faith communities and ethical traditions to create a shared understanding of the fundamental values underlying public life. It would take place at all levels and in all regions. The outcome might well be – in the tradition of Magna Carta and other such declarations of rights over the centuries – a statement of the principles and values which foster the common good, and should underpin and guide public life. (*Paragraphs 3.13–3.14 and 3.30*)

2. **Religion and belief literacy**

There is a widespread need for greater religion and belief literacy. Relevant educational and professional bodies should draw up syllabuses, courses, programmes and modules. (*Paragraphs 3.16–3.23 and 3.31*)

3. **House of Lords**

The pluralist character of modern society should be reflected in national forums such as the House of Lords, so that they include a wider range of worldviews and religious traditions, and of Christian denominations other than the Church of England, as recommended by the Royal Commission on the Reform of the House of Lords. (*Paragraphs 3.24 and 3.34*)

4. **Ceremonies**

All those responsible for national and civic events, whether in the public sphere or in church, including the Coronation, should ensure that the pluralist character of modern society is reflected. (*Paragraphs 3.25–3.26 and 3.32*)

5. **Chaplaincy**

Funding for chaplaincies in hospitals, prisons and higher education should be protected with equitable representation for those from non-Christian religious traditions and for those from humanist traditions. (*Paragraphs 3.27 and 3.33*)

EDUCATION (chapter 4)

6. *Statutory entitlement*

Governments across the UK should introduce a statutory entitlement for all schools within the state system for a subject dealing with religious and non-religious worldviews. They should establish content and learning objectives that can be flexibly applied by teachers, allowing the minimum requirements to be built on differently by different schools. The content should be broad and inclusive in a way that reflects the diversity of religion and belief in the UK, and the subject should have the same status as other humanities subjects. (Paragraphs 4.22–4.24 and 4.27)

7. *Collective worship*

Governments should repeal requirements for schools to hold acts of collective worship or religious observance and issue new guidelines building on current best practice for inclusive assemblies and times for reflection that draw upon a range of sources, that are appropriate for pupils and staff of all religions and beliefs, and that will contribute to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. (Paragraphs 4.17 and 4.28)

8. *Admissions and employment*

Responsible bodies should recognise the negative practical consequences of selection by religion in schools, and that most religious schools can further their aims without selecting on grounds of religion in their admissions and employment practices, and should take measures to reduce such selection. (Paragraphs 4.10–4.12 and 4.28)

9. *Outside the timetable*

Governments should expect publicly funded schools to be open for the provision of religion- or belief-specific teaching and worship on the school premises outside of the timetable for those who request it and wish to participate; this would be in line with the autonomy of young people and their human right to freedom of religion or belief. (Paragraph 4.28)

10. *Inspection*

State inspectorates should be concerned with every aspect of the life of faith schools, including religious elements currently inspected by denominational authorities. (Paragraph 4.28)

11. *Training*

In all teacher education attention should be given to religion and belief that is of a similar level to that which is given to reading and maths, so that every primary class teacher is confident and competent in this curriculum area, whether implicit or explicit, and so that in secondary and FE teaching all staff have general awareness of relevant sensitivities. (Paragraphs 4.16 and 4.28)

12. *Dialogue and enquiry*

Governments should clarify and emphasise that in all phases and sectors of the education system respectful and thoughtful discussion of contrasting opinions and worldviews is essential, and that all staff have skills in the educative handling of sensitive and controversial issues. (Paragraphs 4.25–26 and 4.28)

13. Continuing professional development

In the light of the public sector equality duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) the Equality and Human Rights Commission, or a similar body, should produce best practice guidelines on matters of religion and belief in the initial training and continuing professional development of staff employed in higher education; and in professions such as law, medicine, nursing and social work; and in government and public administration. (Paragraph 4.29)

MEDIA (chapter 5)**14. Religion and belief literacy**

Serious and ongoing attempts should be made to increase religion and belief literacy among all journalists and reporters. Possible ways of achieving this include: every newsroom retaining at least one religion and belief specialist, or subscribing to one specialist agency; a core element in all media training courses to include world religions and the implications of the changing religious landscape; the possibility of short placements in religion media outlets and organised exchanges of journalists in religious media with those in other outlets; a national commitment to funding such projects by relevant civil society bodies. (Paragraph 5.27)

15. Advisory panel

Consideration should be given to establishing a panel of experts on religion and belief for the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) to use when there are complaints about the media. This may strengthen self-regulation of the media and help reassure the public about the quality of reporting on religion and belief. The panel would also be responsible for publishing an annual index of religion and belief literacy which would identify media outlets with best practice as well as those who need to improve the quality of their reporting on religion and belief. (Paragraph 5.29)

16. Awards scheme

It would be relevant and valuable to establish a prize (along the lines of existing prizes for religious broadcasting and for issues like mental health) which would recognise and reward the best in religion and belief coverage in the print and social media. (Paragraph 5.30)

17. Media literacy

Antagonism between religion and belief and media representatives should be reduced by developing relationships and understanding, not simply so that complaints can be aired. (Paragraph 5.31)

18. BBC

The coverage of religion should continue to be mandated in the BBC 2016 charter and it should take into account the UK's changing religious landscape. There should be a reference in the charter to the exploration of ethical dilemmas and the need for the public to come together at times of national grief or celebration. (Paragraph 5.32)

19. *Thought for the Day*

Slots in Radio 4's *Thought for the Day* should be extended to include contributions from those who will speak from a non-religious perspective, including humanists. (Paragraph 5.33)

20. *Commercial channels and stations*

Major commercial channels and stations should examine their policies on the coverage of religious topics to ensure that the place of religion and belief in society is adequately represented. (Paragraph 5.34)

DIALOGUE (chapter 6)**21. *Encounter and dialogue***

It should be a high priority, not only for interfaith organisations but also for all religion and belief groups, educational institutions, public bodies and voluntary organisations, to promote opportunities for encounter and dialogue. (Paragraph 6.35)

22. *Leadership training*

Leaders of religion and belief groups should, with appropriate training, have good knowledge of the different traditions and communities within the UK, and should encourage their members to participate in dialogue and to help develop and maintain good relations within society. (Paragraph 6.35)

23. *Open days and events*

Faith communities should consider opening their places of worship at regular intervals to welcome and engage with those from other groups within their locality, and should explore the possibilities of twinning arrangements with other communities. (Paragraph 6.35)

24. *Involvement*

There should be more bilateral dialogue between Abrahamic and Dharmic traditions and between those who are religious and those who are not; more encounter and dialogue among young people should be promoted; and more women should become involved in interfaith structures. (Paragraph 6.35)

25. *Funding*

Major trusts and corporate responsibility programmes should consider supporting projects at both local and national levels to develop interreligious understanding, and/or to bring religion and belief groups together to work on social projects. (Paragraph 6.36)

26. *Role of government*

Government funding for interreligious dialogue should continue and the criteria for government grants should ensure that they serve to underpin the aspirations of the recipient bodies themselves, which should also be given help in identifying alternative sources of funding in readiness for when grants expire. (Paragraphs 6.21–6.22 and 6.36)

ACTION (chapter 7)

27. *Balance between service provision and advocacy*

Those engaged in social action need to consider the balance they wish to strike between providing services and campaigning for social justice. The energy consumed in meeting immediate needs should not be such that systemic injustices remain unchallenged. (*Paragraph 7.22 and 7.31*)

28. *Proactive planning*

Organisations rooted in a particular religion or belief should become more proactive in identifying areas of social need where they can engage in common action across deep difference, and funding bodies should encourage social action which achieves this goal wherever it is possible. (*Paragraph 7.24 and 7.31*)

29. *Lobbying*

National government should review the provisions of the Lobbying Act, to ensure that charities working for social justice are not prevented from campaigning as well as meeting needs. (*Paragraphs 7.22 and 7.31*)

30. *Dharmic traditions*

Training is particularly needed that enables organisations to engage more effectively with non-Abrahamic faith and belief groups, rather than assuming a one-size-fits-all model of religious engagement in social action. (*Paragraph 7.30 and 7.31*)

31. *Sharing motivation and seeking converts*

More generally, local and national government should work together with religion and belief groups to reach a common understanding of the distinction between appropriate ways of sharing the motivations for faith-based social action and inappropriate seeking of converts, and at the same time of the importance of recognising the spiritual needs of vulnerable people. (*Paragraph 7.21 and 7.31*)

32. *Fair funding*

Charitable trusts and CSR (corporate social responsibility) bodies should work with faith-based charities positioned to address particular social issues. If a religion- or belief-based organisation is best placed to deliver a social good, then it should not be disadvantaged in applying for funding to do so, assuming its services are not exclusive or aimed at seeking converts. (*Paragraphs 7.19–7.21 and 7.31*)

LAW (chapter 8)

33. *The balancing of rights*

An appropriate body, for example the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS), should consider publishing guidance to encourage dialogue, mediation and dispute resolution where the manifestation of religion or belief in public life impacts or conflicts with the freedoms and rights of others. (*Paragraphs 8.7–8.11 and paragraph 8.26*)

34. *Minority religious tribunals and courts – (a) policy research*

Further academic research is required to identify which communities, other than Christians, Jews and Muslims, have religion-based law or tribunals. More needs to be known about the experience and impact of tribunal decisions on women users, and about the impact of state policies on the procedures and substantive rules of these tribunals. Future policy research could focus on identifying areas where the tribunals might work to support the civil law while protecting religious identity. (*Paragraphs 8.12–8.17 and 8.27*)

35. *Minority religious tribunals and courts – (b) best practice*

The Ministry of Justice should examine issues arising from formal and informal religious tribunals with a view to disseminating best practice – particularly with regards to good practice structures and processes and the promotion of gender equality; determining whether marriages between members of minority religious groups should be required, first or simultaneously, to be registered according to English law; determining whether all religious tribunals addressing civil disputes should be required to have structures and processes compatible with arbitration legislation. (*Paragraphs 8.12–8.17 and 8.28*)

36. *The concept of ethnicity*

An appropriate body, for example the Equality and Human Rights Commission or the Law Commission, should review how the categories of race, ethnicity and religion interact in practice and whether there are certain unjust anomalies which must be recognised and addressed, so that the law is more relevant, meaningful and fair in the light of more recent experience. (*Paragraphs 8.18–8.21 and 8.29–8.31*)

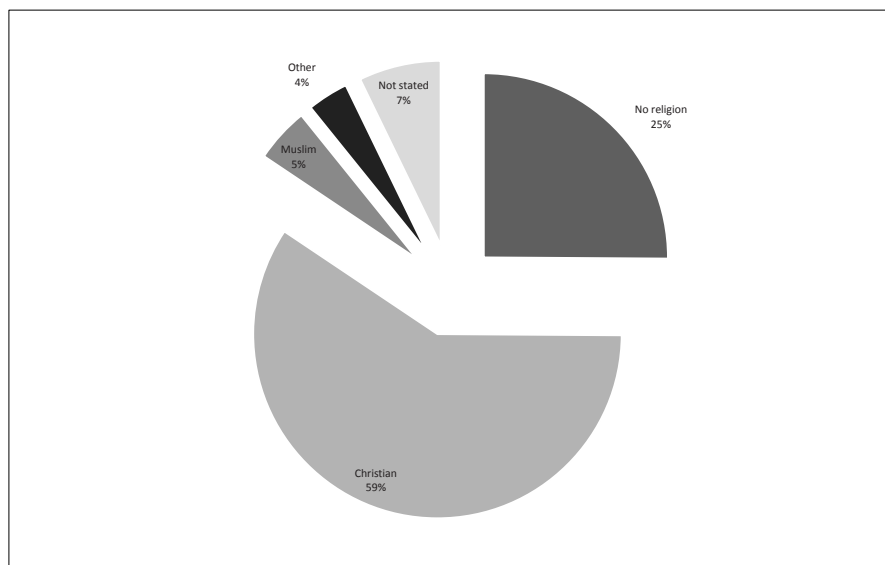
37. *Counter-terrorism legislation*

In framing counter-terrorism legislation, the government should seek to promote, not limit, freedom of enquiry, speech and expression, and should engage with a wide range of affected groups, including those with which it disagrees, and also with academic research. It should lead public opinion by challenging negative stereotyping and by speaking out in support of groups that may otherwise feel vulnerable and excluded. (*Paragraphs 8.22–8.25 and 8.32*)

APPENDIX A

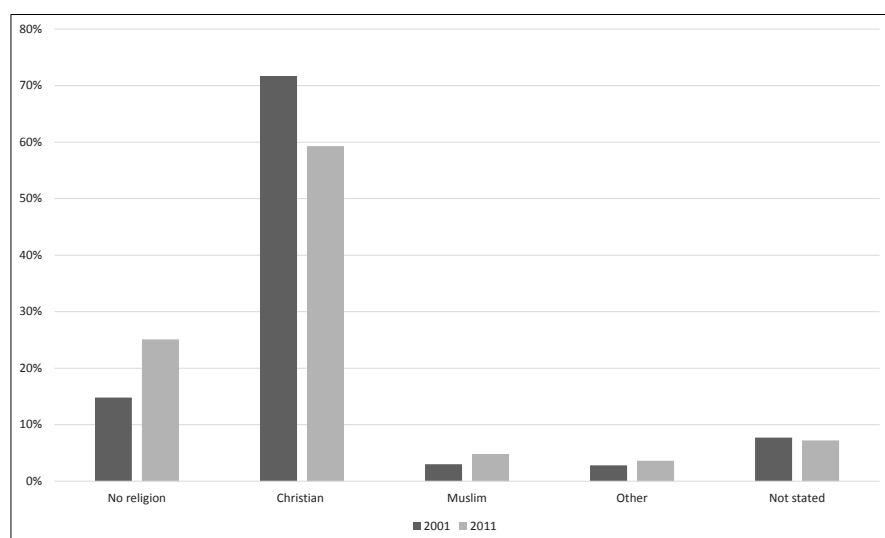
Key Statistics

A.1. Religious affiliation in England and Wales, 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2012).



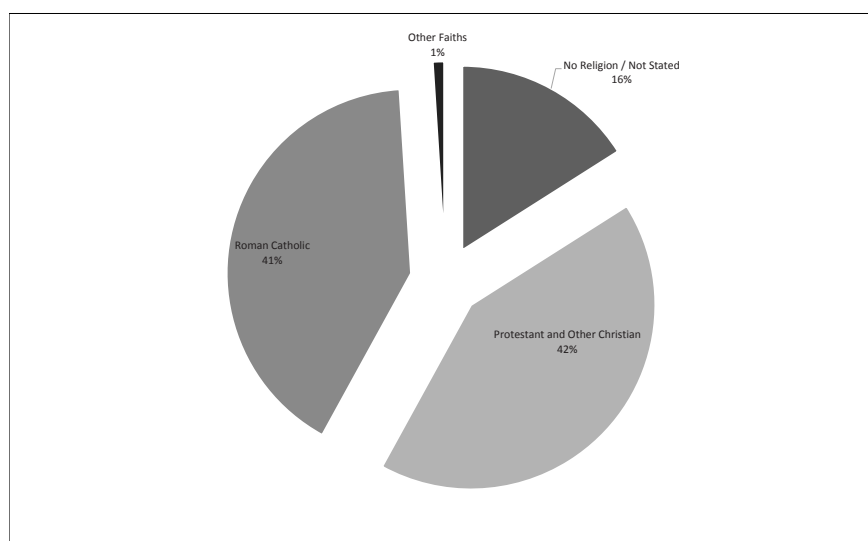
As recorded by the 2011 Census of England and Wales, a majority of citizens continue to identify with Christianity.

A.2. Changes in religious affiliation in England and Wales, 2001 and 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2012).



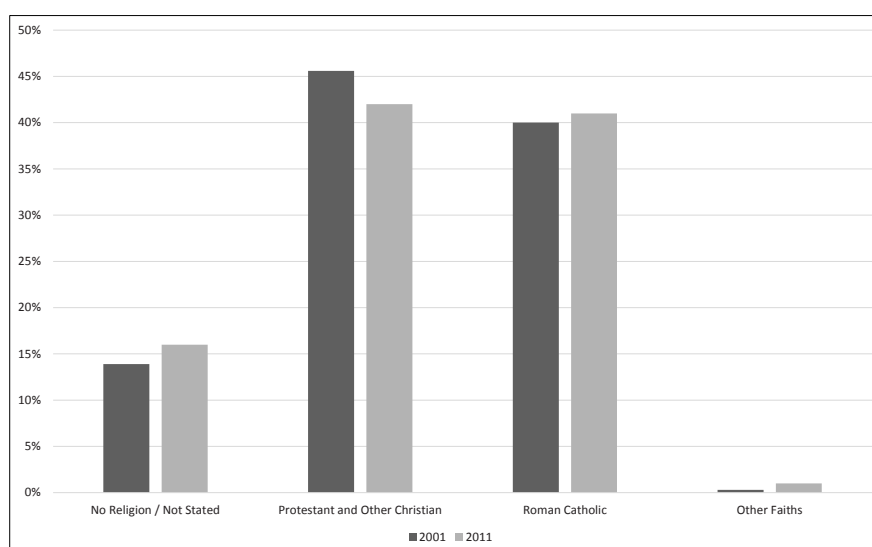
This side-by-side comparison shows the change of religious affiliation in England and Wales over the span of ten years, according to the 2001 and 2011 censuses. The proportion of people not affiliating with a religion increased from 15 per cent to 25 per cent. Muslim populations and smaller religious communities in the 'Other' category also increased in size.

A.3. Religious affiliation in Northern Ireland, 2011 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2011).



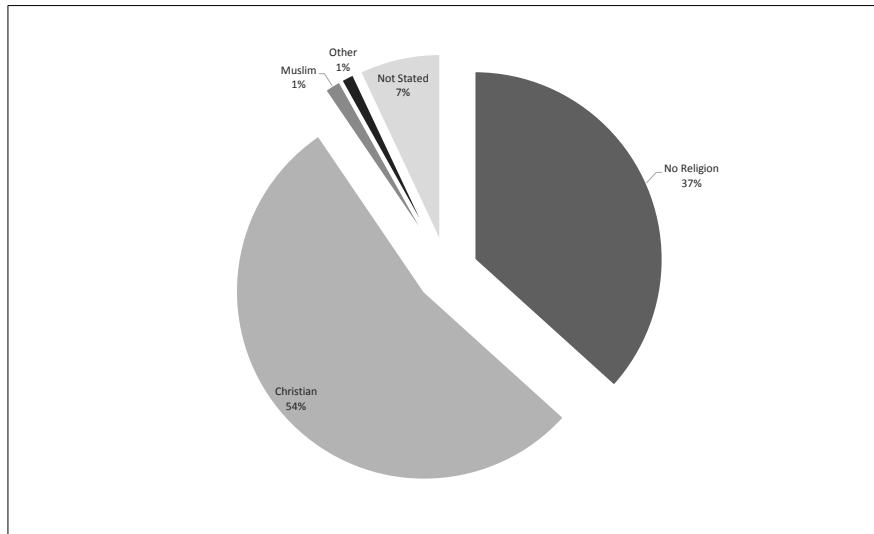
Levels of religious affiliation remain higher in Northern than in England, Wales and Scotland. In the 2011 census about 40 per cent of people identified as Catholic and about 40 per cent as Protestant or as 'Other Christian'.

A.4. Changes in religious affiliation in Northern Ireland, 2001 and 2011 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2001 and 2011).



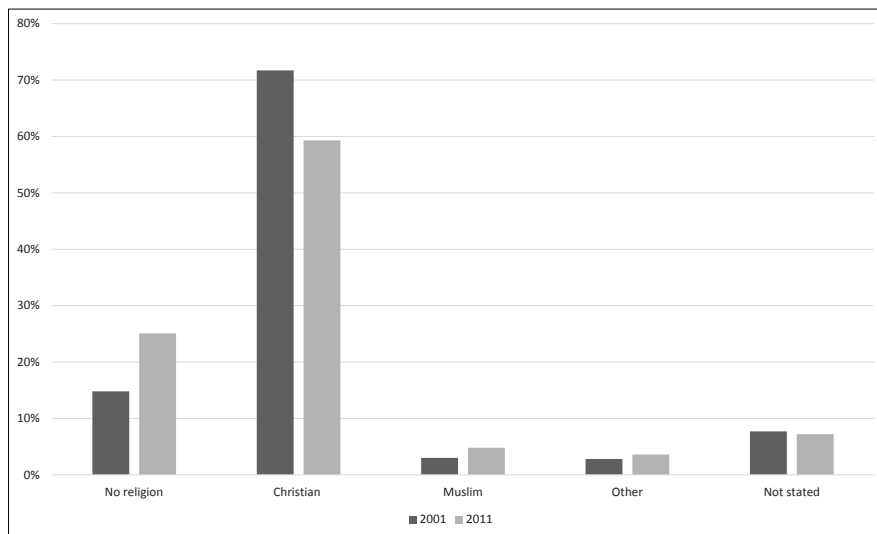
As shown in the figure above, since 2001 the proportion of people claiming no religious affiliation has increased, though not by the same extent as in England, Wales and Scotland. There has been a decrease in Protestant and 'Other Christian' numbers, whilst the numbers of those who affiliate as Catholic or with 'Other Faiths' have risen slightly. (Note that the 2001 census combined the categories of No Religion and Not Stated, whereas these were separate options in 2011).

A.5. Religious affiliation in Scotland, 2011 (Scotland's Census, 2013).



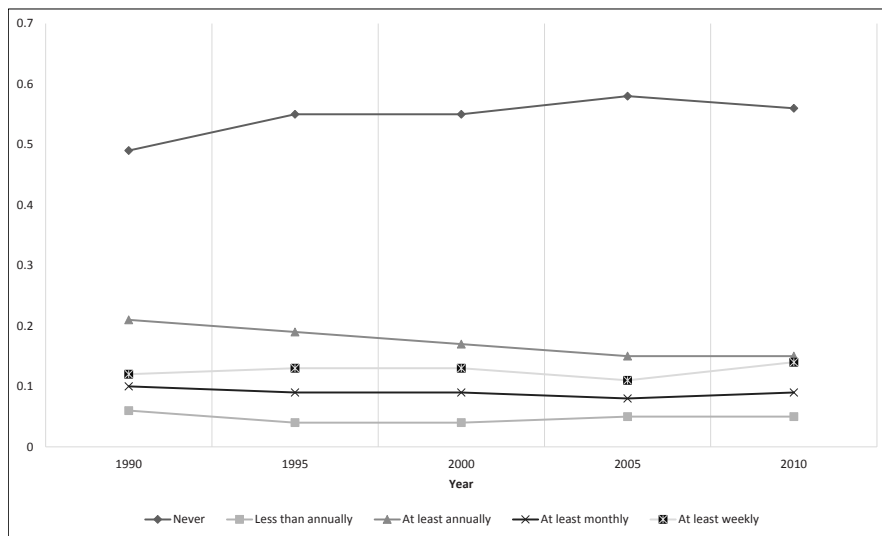
The figure above shows religious affiliation levels in Scotland according to the 2011 census. A higher proportion of people described themselves as non-religious in the Scottish census than in the English and Welsh census.

A.6. Changes in religious affiliation in Scotland, 2001 and 2011 (Scotland's Census, 2013).



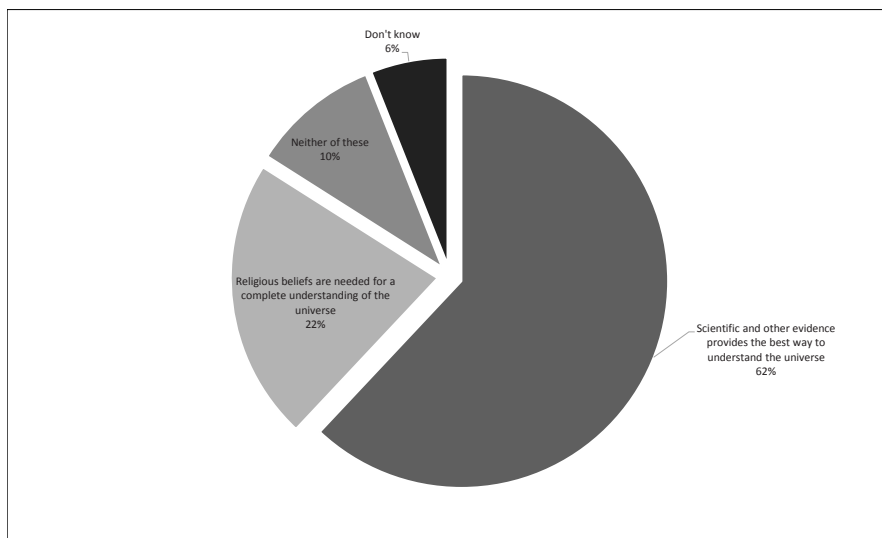
The figure above shows the change in religious affiliation between the two national censuses taking place in 2001 and 2011. Similar to England and Wales, the proportion of people describing themselves as Christian has declined whilst the proportion of those stating no religion has risen.

A.7. Religious attendance in Britain, 1990–2010 (Park et al, 2012, p. 180.).



The figure above uses data from the British Social Attitudes Survey to illustrate the frequency of attendance at places of worship among respondents who either affiliate with a religion or were brought up in one. The percentage of people who say they do not attend religious services rose from 49 per cent in 1990 to 56 per cent in 2010.

A.8. Humanist beliefs (Ipsos MORI, 2007).



In this poll commissioned by the British Humanist Association in 2006, 975 participants in England, Wales and Scotland were asked, 'If you had to choose just one of the statements which one best matches your view?' A large majority of respondents understand the universe in the context of scientific and 'other evidence', identified by the BHA as the 'humanist related opinion' in the survey. (Based on the proportion of respondents who selected the 'humanist standpoints' in answer to three questions in this poll, the BHA determined that 36 per cent of Britons have a 'humanist outlook on life'.)

APPENDIX B

The consultation process

Summary

The commission held six weekend seminars between 2013 and 2015, broadly corresponding to the six themes of its eventual report - vision, education, media, dialogue, social action and law.

A 12-page booklet was published in June 2014. There were 220 respondents, and between them they submitted more than 250 separate documents. About 50 of the respondents wrote on behalf of organisations and on the basis of consultations and meetings arranged by themselves. Six of the written submissions were published together in a special issue of the web-based journal *Public Spirit*, based at the University of Bristol. At a conservative estimate, the written material submitted to the commission ran to over 400,000 words. All the major world faiths were represented, as were most major denominations within Christianity in the UK, and all four nations of the UK. Several respondents wrote from non-religious standpoints.

Hearings were held in Belfast, Birmingham, Cardiff, Glasgow, Leeds, Leicester and London. Each hearing was organised in partnership with a local institution or organisation: St Anne's Cathedral, Belfast; University of Birmingham; Muslim Council of Wales, Cardiff; Humanist Society Scotland and Glasgow University; Bishop of Ripon and Leeds; Bishop of Leicester; and Faiths Forum for London. The hearing in Birmingham was a national event for young people in the 17–25 age range.

On Thursday 27 November 2014 there was a four-hour debate in the House of Lords on religion and belief in public life, initiated by a member of the Commission. Twenty-two substantial speeches were made, including one on behalf of the Government by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey kindly hosted two Commission day-meetings, marking the beginning and completion of our work.

The chair or vice-chair of the commission, usually accompanied by at least one other commissioner, engaged in a series of personal interviews, conversations and meetings.

The commission is grateful to the many individuals who submitted evidence, and to their institutions and organisations. They are named on the following pages.

Weekend seminars

The following gave presentations at the seminars, and took part at them in formal and informal discussions:

Chris Baker, University of Chester and William Temple Foundation; Ian Blair, formerly of the Metropolitan Police Service; Tufyal Choudhury, Durham University; Linda Colley, Princeton University (recorded interview); Harriet Crabtree, Inter Faith Network for the UK; Charlotte Dando, William Temple Foundation; Francis Davis,

University of Birmingham; Adam Dinham, Goldsmiths, University of London; Mary Earl, University of Cambridge; Arup Ganguly, Sewa Day; Brian Gates, University of Cumbria; Nigel Genders, Church of England Education Office; Andrew Graystone, Church and Media Network; Paul Hackwood, Church Urban Fund; Emma Ing, Ofsted; Rana Jawad, University of Bath; Sunder Katwala, British Future; Samantha Knights, Matrix Chambers; Clifford Longley, journalist; Diarmaid MacCulloch, University of Oxford; Ronan McCrea, University College London; Gary McLelland, Humanist Society Scotland; Joyce Miller, Religious Education Council; Raymond Plant, King's College London; Fakhara Rehman, Kirklees Faiths Forum; Norman Richardson, Stranmillis University College; Bernard Rix, formerly Lord Justice of Appeal; Jonathan Romain, Accord Coalition; Julie Siddiqi, Sadaqa Day; Chaya Spitz, Interlink Foundation; Stephen Timms, All-Party Parliamentary Group on Faith and Society; Paul Weller, University of Derby; Matthew Wilkinson, Curriculum for Cohesion; Rowan Williams, University of Cambridge; Harry Woolf, former Lord Chief Justice.

Interviews and personal meetings

The chair or vice-chair of the commission, usually accompanied by at least one other commissioner, engaged in personal conversations and meetings with the following:

David Abrahams, Channel 4; Aakil Ahmed, BBC; Baroness (Elizabeth) Berridge, All Party Group on International Freedom of Religion and Belief; Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, University of Cambridge; Revd Canon Dr Malcolm Brown, Mission and Public Affairs Division, Church of England; Professor Craig Calhoun, London School of Economics; Mick Davis, Holocaust Commission; John Denham MP; Professor Adam Dinham, Goldsmiths, University of London; David Frei, United Synagogue; Nick Gibb MP, Department for Education; James Harding, BBC; Khola Hasan, Islamic Sharia Council; Professor John Joughin, University of East London; Sukhi Kainth, National Union of Students; Yusuf Kaplan, University of Westminster; Sewa Singh Lalli, Khalistan Government in Exile; Gary Loke, Equality Challenge Unit; Rt Hon Theresa May MP, home secretary; Ephraim Mirvis, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth; William Nye, private secretary to HRH Prince of Wales; Baroness (Onora) O'Neill, Equality and Human Rights Commission; Maurice Ostro, Faiths Forum for London; Rabbi Lord (Jonathan) Sacks, King's College London; Lord (Indarjit) Singh, Network of Sikh Organisations UK; John Studzinski, Investor Relations and Business Development at the Blackstone Group; Robin Taylor, Pagan Federation; Orla Tierney, BBC; Revd Dr James Walters, London School of Economics; Baroness (Sayeeda) Warsi, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for Communities and Local Government; The Rt Revd Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury; The Rt Revd Lord (Rowan) Williams, University of Cambridge.

Organisations and institutions

The commission received evidence, assistance and advice on behalf of, or from individuals based at, the following organisations and institutions:

Accord Coalition	BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha UK
Al-Falah Mosque	BBC
Al-Khoei Foundation	– Leeds
Alliance Party, Northern Ireland	– Radio Leicester
Amirah Foundation	Belfast Cathedral
Ammerdown Centre	Belfast Islamic Centre
Association of Muslim Lawyers	Belfast Jewish Community
Asylum Justice and Release	Belfast Sikh Community Association
Audience Council Wales	<i>Belfast Telegraph</i>
Awan Consulting Ltd	Bible Theology Ministries

Board of Deputies of British Jews and the Community Security Trust
 Bradford Churches for Dialogue and Diversity
 British Humanist Association
 – Northern Ireland
 – South West London
 – West Sussex
 – West Wales
 British Muslims for a Secular Democracy
 British Pilgrimage Trust
 Buddhist Group of Kendal

 Cambridge Inter-faith Programme
 Campaign against Antisemitism
 Cardiff and Vale College
 Centre for the Study of Islam in the UK
 Chapeltown Road Sikh Gurdwara
 Christian Medical Fellowship
 Christian – Muslim Forum
 Christian Science Committee
 The Church in Wales
 The Church of England
 – Board of Mission, Diocese of Oxford
 – Christ the King in Beaumont Leys
 – Diocese of Leicester
 – Diocese of London
 – Diocese of Southwark
 – Diocese of West Yorkshire and the Dales
 – Diocese of Woolwich
 – Parish of Middleton
 – St Christopher's Church in Leicester
 The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (in the UK)
 Church of Scotland
 – Church and Society Council
 – Mayfield Salisbury Parish
 Church Urban Fund
 Churches Together in England
 Citizens UK
 City Sikhs
 Community Relations Initiative
 Conforti Institute
 Council of Christians and Jews
 Council of European Jamaats
 Culham St Gabriel's
 Curriculum Enhancement for the Future
 Cytun

 De Montfort University
 Democratic Unionist Party

Department for Education
 Diverse Cymru

 East Northamptonshire Faith Group
 Education and Lifelong Learning
 Education Scotland
 Eleanor Palmer Primary School
 Equal Rights Trust

 Faith Action
 Faith and Fire
 Faith Based Regeneration Network
 Faith Matters
 Faith Regen
 Faiths Forum for London
 Family Federation for World Peace and Unification
 The Feast
 Federation of Muslim Organisations
 Forward Partnership

 Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha, Birmingham
 Guru Tegh Bahadur Gurdwara

 Henry Jackson Society
 Hindu Council UK
 Hindu Forum of Britain

 Immigration Law Practitioners' Association
 Inform
 Inter Faith Network for the UK (Trustees)
 Interfaith Matters
 Interfaith Scotland
 Iskcon Educational Services
 Islamic Sharia Council

 Jain Network
 Janyang Buddhist Centre Leeds
 Jewish News
 Jewish Volunteering Network

 Kidz Klub

 Lambeth Council
 Lapido Media
 Leeds Church Institute
 Leeds Churches Together in Mission
 Leeds City Council
 Leeds Concord Interfaith Fellowship
 Leeds Faiths Forum
 Leeds Foodbank
 Leeds Grand Mosque

- Leeds Hindu Temple
- Leeds Islamic Centre
- Leeds Jewish Interfaith Network
- Leeds Makkah Masjid
- Leeds Methodist Mission
- Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust
- Leicester Asian Business Association
- Leicester City Council
- Leicestershire Police
- Leicestershire Sikh Alliance
- Leicester Standing Council for Religious Education
- London Boroughs Faiths Network
- London Central Mosque and Islamic Cultural Centre

- Makor Jewish Culture UK
- Markfield Institute for Higher Education
- Methodist Church in Ireland
- Methodist College, Belfast
- Methodist District of Leeds
- Metropolitan Police
- Minster Abbey, Kent
- Mitzvah Day
- Mothers' Union
- Muslim Council of Scotland
- Muslim Council of Wales
- Muslim Engagement and Development

- National Association of Standing Advisory Councils on Religious Education
- National Council of Faiths and Beliefs in Further Education
- National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the UK
- Near Neighbours Project
 - Leeds
 - West London
- Network of Buddhist Organisations
- New Testament Church of God
- Northern Ireland Catholic Council on Social Affairs
- Northern Ireland Muslim Families Association

- Ofsted
- Ostro Minerals
- Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies

- Pagan Federation
- Poverty and Truth Challenges
- Presbyterian Church Ireland
- Public Health England

- Queen's University Belfast

- Radical Middle Way
- Religious Education Council for England and Wales
- Roman Catholic Church
 - Diocese of Leeds
 - Justice and Peace Group, St Austin's Stafford
- Runnymede Trust

- Scottish Episcopal Church, St Mary's Cathedral
- The Scottish Joint Committee for Religious and Moral Education
- Secularist Wales
- South East England Faiths Forum
- South Wales Jewish Representative Council
- Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Leeds
- St George's Crypt
- St John Fisher Academy, Dewsbury
- St Peter's Church, Leicester

- Three Faiths Forum (3FF)
- Tony Blair Faith Foundation

- United Hebrew Congregation Synagogue
- United Reformed Church National Synod of Wales
- Universities
 - Aberdeen
 - Bristol
 - Cardiff
 - Coventry
 - Edinburgh
 - Essex
 - Glasgow
 - King's College London
 - Leeds
 - Middlesex
 - Oxford Brookes
 - Roehampton
 - University College London
 - Warwick
- Von Hugel Institute

- Wales Baha'i Society
- Wales Council for Voluntary Action
- West Yorkshire Police
- Westminster City Council
- Women's Interfaith Network
- World Congress of Faiths

- Yorkshire Society

- Zone Jewish Youth Club
- Zoroastrian Trust Fund

Individuals

The following provided evidence to the commission by submitting written documents in response to our consultation booklet, or by taking part in meetings, hearings and interviews, or in both these ways:

Christine Abbas	Jocelyn Brooks	Sheila Douglas	Michael Hancock
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APPENDIX C

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APPENDIX D

Membership of the commission

Patrons

Professor Lord Parekh of Kingston upon Hull, emeritus professor of political philosophy at the universities of Hull and Westminster; Sir Iqbal Sacranie OBE, formerly secretary general of the Muslim Council of Britain; the Rt Revd and Rt Hon Lord Williams of Oystermouth, master of Magdalene College, Cambridge, and formerly Archbishop of Canterbury; and the Rt Hon Lord Woolf CH, formerly Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales.

Members

Bishop Dr Joe Aldred, staff member responsible for Pentecostal and multicultural relations at Churches Together in England and honorary research fellow at Roehampton University

The Very Revd Dr Ian Bradley, principal of St Mary's College, St Andrews and reader in practical theology and church history at the University of St Andrews

The Rt Hon Baroness Butler-Sloss of Marsh Green GBE, formerly President of the Family Division of the High Court (chair)

Dr Shana Cohen, deputy director of the Woolf Institute, Cambridge

Andrew Copson, chief executive of the British Humanist Association

Shaunaka Rishi Das, director of the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies and Hindu chaplain to the University of Oxford

Professor Gwen Griffith-Dickson, visiting professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, King's College London and emeritus professor of divinity at Gresham College

Professor Mark Hammond, visiting professor in public policy at Canterbury Christ Church University and formerly chief executive of the Equality and Human Rights Commission

The Rt Revd Professor Lord Harries of Pentregarth, emeritus professor of divinity at Gresham College, honorary professor of theology at King's College London and formerly Bishop of Oxford

Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal, senior lecturer, Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham

Dr Edward Kessler MBE, founder-director of the Woolf Institute and fellow of St Edmund's College, Cambridge (convenor and vice-chair)

Professor Francesca Klug OBE, visiting professor at the Centre for the Study of Human Rights at the London School of Economics, former commissioner at the Equality and Human Rights Commission and forthcoming chair of Freedom from Torture

Professor Maleiha Malik, professor of law at King's College London

Professor Tariq Modood MBE, professor of sociology, politics and public policy at the University of Bristol and founding director of the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship, University of Bristol

Shaykh Ibrahim Mogra, community imam in Leicester; co-chair of the Christian-Muslim Forum and assistant general secretary of the Muslim Council of Britain

Professor Lord Parekh of Kingston upon Hull, emeritus professor of political philosophy at the universities of Hull and Westminster

Brian Pearce OBE, former director of the Inter Faith Network for the UK

The Revd Canon Dr Angus Ritchie, director of the Centre for Theology and Community, priest-in-charge at St-George-in-the-East and assistant priest at St Peter's Church, Bethnal Green

Rabbi Dr Norman Solomon, senior associate at the Oxford Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University of Oxford, and former president of the British Association for Jewish Studies and the Birmingham Inter-Faiths Council

The Revd Dr Robert Tosh, formerly senior producer of religious broadcasting at BBC Northern Ireland.

Secretariat

Mohammed Abdul Aziz, director of the Centre for Policy and Public Education at the Woolf Institute; Robin Richardson, who acted as drafting editor of the report; and Liran Morav, Simon Perfect and Austin Tiffany, research assistants at the Woolf Institute.

Advice and assistance

Additional administrative support was generously provided by Claire Curran at the Woolf Institute and Maggie Stevenson at the House of Lords.

Advice and assistance to the work of the commission were given by Nahida Begum, Rt Revd Lord (Robin) Eames, Canon John Hall, Selma Yilmaz Ilkhan, Professor Julius Lipner, Dr David Perfect, Dr Gina Radford, Riaz Ravat and Ben Rich.