

Religion or Belief Equality Policy



A LONG-STANDING TRADITION OF EXCELLENCE

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Appendix B

Religion or Belief Equality Policy

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Introduction

Nelson and Colne College is fully committed to promoting equality of opportunity in religion or belief.

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, which came into force on 2 December 2003, made discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief unlawful in employment and vocational training in Britain. The Equality Act 2006, Part 2, has extended this duty to cover service delivery. Developing an understanding of different faith communities, their practices and beliefs is therefore essential in meeting the requirements of this legislation.

Religions deal with many basic questions, from how life began to what happens to us when we die. Each religion has developed its own beliefs, rituals and ideas on these matters. Though many religions claim to be inspired by God, we need to remember that all religions originated and developed in particular historical, geographical and cultural situations that moulded and influenced them. Religion links together societies and individuals who share the same range of general beliefs, values, codes of behaviour, practices and traditions. Religion also links present day with the customs and practices of the past.

Religion generally includes the following:

- Faith and experience – a sense of belonging and commitment to something greater than ones self.
- Creed and doctrine – the system of beliefs and ideas held about a God, other divinities, creation and salvation.
- Codes and ethics – the way people behave because of their beliefs or non-beliefs.
- Ritual – all that is involved in practicing the belief.
- Community – the social aspects of a religion.

Faith communities are groupings of people who belong to the major world religions and of those who follow other forms of religious expression. This includes those that do not have a faith or religious belief.

Public sector organisations, including Nelson and Colne College, need to address issues of faith in a more systematic and structured approach. It is now necessary that we understand the values of faith, for our learners, customers, staff, contractors, wherever possible, demonstrating a consensus between their faith values and those of the College.

Purpose of this Policy

It is hoped that through open debate and consensus that learners and staff will feel more confident to discuss issues of belief, or more generally, of spirituality with lecturers, managers and fellow workers. Engaging with these issues will assist learners and staff in our workplace to strive for higher standards with maximum impact and added value.

This Policy sets out how Nelson and Colne College will work towards the promotion of religion or belief equality in all of its activities. It outlines how the College will ensure that religious discrimination is challenged and eliminated through legislation and good practice.

Legal Responsibilities

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations came into force on the 2nd December 2003. This Regulation makes it unlawful to discriminate against workers, employees, job seekers and trainees because of their age. The Regulations were further extended by Part 2 of the Equality Act 2006 to include all aspects of service delivery. The Equality Act 2006 protects everyone from direct and indirect discrimination, victimisation and harassment in employment, vocational training and service delivery on the grounds of religion or belief.

The regulations cover recruitment, terms and conditions, promotions, transfers, dismissal, training and all practices and procedures involved in service delivery.

The regulations make it unlawful on the grounds of religion or belief to discriminate on the basis of:

- A persons actual religion or belief;
- A religion or belief they are thought to have; or
- The religion or belief of someone else with whom they are associated (for instance, someone such as a friend or member of their family)

They also prohibit discrimination against a person because they do not hold a religion or belief.

Part 2 protects people from being discriminated against because, for example;

- They hold a particular religion;
- They are married to a person of a particular religion;
- They appear to be of a particular religion because of the way they dress;
- They are not of a particular religion

Part 2 also outlaws discrimination on the grounds of lack of a religion or belief. It will therefore be unlawful to discriminate against someone on the grounds that they do not belong to a particular religion or any religion at all.

Part 2 of the Equality Act 2006 also prohibits both direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. This extends protection to cover victimisation.

The Act also provides protection against discriminatory advertisements, instructing or causing discrimination. Employers are liable for the actions of their employees and agents, whether or not they know about, or approve of, the Act.

Part 2 applies to all forms of goods, services and facilities and it is unlawful to discriminate in the following:

- Access to, and use of, a place – that the public is permitted to enter;
- Accommodation – in establishments such as hotels and boarding houses;
- Facilities for banking, insurance, grants, loans, credit or finances;
- Facilities for entertaining, recreation or refreshment;
- Facilities for transport or travel;
- Professional or trade services

Religion or Belief Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs)

What is the Purpose of an EqIA?

Nelson and Colne College should have 'due regard' to the parts of the duty that make up the General duty. This means that the weight given to religion or belief equality should be proportionate to its relevance to a particular function. Some functions, particularly of a technical nature, may be judged as not being relevant to the duty. Greater consideration and effort should therefore be directed at functions and policies which have most effect on the public, (learners/clients), or on the College's employees. The College's concern will be to ask whether particular policies could affect religion or belief in different ways and whether the policies will promote good religious relations.

The College will follow the statutory guidance by considering the following four steps to meet the General duty:

- Identify which functions and policies are relevant to the duty or, in other words, have the most effect on religion or belief equality.

- Put the functions in priority order, based on how relevant they are to religion or belief equality.
- Assess whether the way these ‘relevant’ functions and policies are being carried out meets the criteria within the General duty.
- Consider whether any changes need to be made to meet the duty, and make the changes

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) is therefore to improve the work of the College by making sure it does not discriminate and that, where possible, it promotes equality. It is a way to make sure individuals and teams think carefully about the likely impact of their work on equality target groups and take action to improve policies, services, strategies, procedures and functions. It also involves anticipating the consequences of policies and projects on the target groups and making sure that, as far as possible, any negative consequences are eliminated or minimised and opportunities for promoting equality are maximised.

Where does an EqIA come from?

Equality Impact Assessments originate from the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. Both Acts place obligations on local authorities and public sector organisations, including Colleges and Universities to carry out impact assessments.

The College’s process is therefore aimed at assessing the impact of policies, strategies, functions or services on Religion or Belief equality.

What is meant by “Impact”?

The College will look at two possible impacts in its assessment:

1. A negative or adverse impact:

This is an impact that could disadvantage one or more equality groups. This disadvantage may be differential, where the negative impact on one particular group of individuals or one equality group is likely to be greater than on another. The Equality Impact Assessment provides an opportunity to assess this.

For example: an organisation refuses to provide employees with the opportunity to pray during working hours. This would have a negative impact on some religious groups as some religions require followers to pray several times per day.

2. A positive impact:

An impact that could have a positive impact on one or more equality target groups, or improve equal opportunities and/or relationships between groups. This positive impact may be differential, where the positive impact on one particular group of individuals or one equality group is likely to be greater than on another.

For example: A Muslim women only swimming session at a local leisure facility will have a positive impact on Muslim women as their faith does not allow for them to swim with Muslim males.

When should an Equality Impact Assessment be carried out?

An Equality Impact Assessment should be carried out when:

- Developing a new policy, service, strategy, procedure or function.
- Reviewing existing policies, procedures, or functions.
- A policy, procedure, function or strategy has been identified as requiring an EqIA by partnership working, Academies, Service areas, Senior Management Teams, or Governors

All College managers are responsible for incorporating equalities into their policies, procedures, functions or strategies, and for assessing the equalities impacts. This should be a continuous cycle, starting at the very beginning of the process. If there is any doubt as to whether a policy, strategy or function requires initial screening, managers should contact a member of the Equality and Diversity Working Group or Human Resources for guidance and assistance.

The Equality Impact Assessment consists of two parts:

- The initial screening process.
- The more thorough full assessment if the initial screening has identified an adverse / negative impact

Initial Screening

This part of the Equality Impact Assessment form should be completed during the development or review stage before approval for the policy, service, strategy, procedure or function. Once initial screening has been completed, a full assessment is only required if:

- Any equality group was identified as being disadvantaged or negatively impacted by the policy / strategy / project.
- The impact was assessed as of high significance.
- The impact was not intentional and/or illegal, i.e. discriminatory under anti-discrimination legislation

Completing an EqlA is similar to a risk assessment as it involves predicting and assessing the implications of a policy, service, strategy, procedure or function on a wide range of people with different needs. Furthermore, this should not be carried out in isolation, but with the support and advice of others. Effective consultation with stakeholders is a key ingredient in conducting Equality Impact Assessments. At the preliminary screening stage, it should become obvious whether there is a negative or positive impact or gaps in knowledge about likely impacts. It should be a relatively short process which makes use of previous consultation results, personal knowledge and experience, research and reports, internet searches, internal and external specialist advice, staff with previous experience of similar strategies or projects etc. If there is a lack of data or information concerning a particular area, this should not be a reason to stop the process. If the likely impact on a particular group is unknown, then action needs to be taken to acquire this information.

Full Impact Assessment

This part provides an opportunity to assess the evidence for a possible negative impact. It ensures that research and consultation with the equality target groups has been carried out and leads to an improvement plan aiming to minimise the negative impact and, where possible, maximise the positive impact.

Consultation involves engaging with representatives from equality groups who are likely to be affected by the policy, strategy or project. This could include engaging with staff and students, staff and student networks or trade unions, other public bodies or voluntary and community groups. It is important to ensure sufficient time and resources are dedicated to the consultation process to encourage full participation, particularly by those we have traditionally failed to reach.

The public will be able to examine completed EqlAs if they request to see them and summary information about EqlAs should be available on the College's Website.

Publishing the results of EqlAs is key to establishing accountability and maintaining public confidence. It will demonstrate that the College is committed to promoting equality, monitoring, assessing and consulting on the effects of its policy, service, strategy, procedure or function.

Each main strategy and function will be assessed as being of high, medium or low priority. Apart from the main corporate strategies and policies, the service areas managed by Heads of Service will be the basic units for the assessment of functions and policies. More detailed work, following the preliminary screening, will be carried out in two phases, thus validating the degree of relevance, if any, and hence

priority, and identify the work that needs to be done on functions and policies in order to comply with the duty.

An Equality and Diversity Working group drawn from across the College will co-ordinate the process, develop internal guidance and otherwise support Heads of Service and strategy review teams in their work. The Equality and Diversity Working group will produce a detailed timetable and ensure it is adhered to and that action plans are drawn up and implemented.

Monitoring, Reviewing and Reporting

The Nelson and Colne College Senior Management team is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the planning and provision of our services meet the needs of all our students, clients and staff.

The Equality and Diversity Working Group is responsible for monitoring the progress we make on promoting religion or belief in equality. Additionally, all students, staff and Governors have a duty to promote religion or belief equality in everything they do, and collectively they are responsible for realising the commitments outlined in this Policy.

Review and Annual Reporting

We will report annually on the progress we have made towards promoting religion or belief equality. To help us do this effectively, we will ask students, members of staff and relevant stakeholders for their feedback. As part of these reviews, we will consider the information we collect on how religious groups are accessing employment opportunities to ensure that we are making progress.

The Equality and Diversity working group will meet termly to review the College's progress on religion or belief equality. Progress will also be monitored and managed across the organisation through our performance management framework.

This Religion or Belief Equality Policy will be subject to on-going review.

Appendix A: Religion or Belief Equality Action Plan

No.	Objective	Action	Responsibility	Measuring Success	Timescale	Link to other policies
1	The College meets, in full, legislative requirements and actively promotes equality and diversity in relation to religion or belief amongst staff, students, employers, parents and other partners as a requirement of legislation					
2	The College ensures that all equality and diversity staff development initiatives include religion or belief					
3	The College manages incidents and complaints specifically about religion or belief					
4	The College actively celebrates contributions from all student groups and cultures specifically in relation to religion or belief					

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Beacon College status confirms Nelson and Colne
as one of the country's best colleges

Nelson and Colne College - Judged
'OUTSTANDING' by Ofsted

