

A Guide to Inclusive Events – Religion and Belief

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Introduction

Business is changing. UK businesses have seen an increase in diversity across many different demographics including religious diversity. In the 2011 UK census there were: 33.2 million people identified as Christians

2.7 million as Muslim

817,000 as Hindu

423,000 as Sikh

263,000 as Jewish

248,000 as Buddhist.

That means that 65% of the UK population identified as having a religion.

Naturally there are increasingly diverse groups in the workplace and to improve employee engagement, retention rates and employee wellbeing we need to make our workplaces inclusive in everyway possible. Being responsive to the changing needs of our diverse workforce and stakeholder groups is in the best interests of all. This guide is aimed at reaching that goal in the field of event management.

The organisation and management of events requires careful consideration of the core aims of the event and addressing the needs of the attendees to ensure its success. Faith considerations range from accessibility, to dietary, to timing and the requirements for breaks. This guide can be used to enhance existing inclusive practices in event management. While it is not always possible to cater for all individual needs, maintaining an awareness of religious and cultural diversities, and providing what is possible at events contributes to an inclusive environment.

This guide has been put together to assist event managers in catering for people of different faiths. The five main religious groups as identified by the 2011 census are Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs and Jews and therefore this guide will endeavor to focus on these faith groups, however much of the guidance can be used to engage and include people from other faiths also.

The guide is by no means exhaustive and does not cover all cultures and religions, but provides some suggestions that can be considered throughout the event planning process.

We hope you find it useful.

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General Planning

Making an event inclusive takes time and consideration from the event planners. It is always advisable to begin the planning process as far in advance as possible so that all groups can be considered.

It is helpful to start by considering who will be attending this event. If it's a large company event contact your faith networks/inter-faith network and ask for their input. If you do not have a faith network then your Diversity and Inclusion Manager or HR Team can be consulted.

Picking the Day

The date for a work-based event will be broadly governed by the main business objective and previous patterns for annual events. There will be other considerations such as public holidays, school holidays, etc. that should be taken into account to ensure maximum attendance.

There are a number of festivals and days of worship observed by different faith groups. A useful tool to assist is a religious events calendar, which highlights notable dates for all major faith groups, enabling event managers to avoid dates that may preclude members of any particular faith. Again it may be difficult to ensure that all faiths are taken into consideration. However having some knowledge of your workforce demographics will mean that you can cater for the needs of as many groups as possible.

There are a variety of religious calendars available from different organisations. Keeping a copy of this on the work intranet will help to ensure everyone can consult the calendar before picking an event date.

There are certain days/parts of days that are of particular significance to certain faiths and you may wish to avoid running events at these times, where possible.

The Jewish Sabbath is celebrated from just before sunset on Friday to after sunset on Saturday. It is considered a festive day, when a Jew is freed from the regular labours of everyday life, can contemplate the spiritual aspects of life, and can spend time with family. The exact times, therefore depending on the time of sunset at each location.

For Muslims, special congregational prayers usually held in a Mosque, take place on Friday. The exact timings will vary as the prayer times are linked to the position of the sun. However a broad rule would be lunchtime, between 12.30 and 14.00.

Sundays are of significance to Christians; in general it is the morning of Sunday when most Church Services are held, this day is reserved for faith and family.

The interpretation and the degree to which any particular individual observes the Sabbath and Friday prayers (for Muslims) or Sunday worship may vary. As such, best practice would be to avoid these times as far as is possible.

Choice of Venue

For many religious groups one of the main obstacles to attending events may be the venue. Social events are often held in pubs, bars or clubs. For those who don't drink these may not be suitable venues and may prevent them from attending. Some people's religious beliefs mean they cannot attend venues that sell alcohol. Therefore event managers should try and think of alternatives if possible to ensure venues are as inclusive as possible.

Multi-faith/prayer space

Try and ensure a clean, quiet space is made available for prayer, which is clearly signposted at the venue. If possible, try to establish which direction is Southeast in the room, or provide a compass or app as this is the direction Muslims face when praying.

The Islamic faith has particular rules that Muslims may follow regarding personal hygiene. The Muslim prayer is preceded by ablution, people may need access to wash facilities. These should be well signposted.

If possible providing bottles in the toilet's or a plastic bowl to be filled with water and something to put down on the floor such as a towel or sheet at the washroom basins would be a great way to show your delegates your respect and your desire to be inclusive of their religion.

You may need to consider different people using the space at different times of the day. People from different faiths may not wish to pray at the same time. Also some faiths such as Mormons and Muslims may not wish to pray with the opposite sex.

Religious articles should be brought into the room by the person of faith and removed again by them following worship. It may be helpful to put a sign on the door of the pray space informing everyone what the space is for and the rules governing its use. See appendix 1 for an example.

Agenda

Try and arrange breaks that coincide with prayer times. Muslims are required to pray 5 times a day - at dawn, early afternoon, late afternoon, after sunset, in the night. However, not all Muslims will observe these 5 prayers.

Note that prayer times are not fixed but fluctuate throughout the year according to daylight hours so in the winter, up to 3 prayers can fall within the working day.

Prayer timetables are available from a variety of sources including [Salah Times](#) and [ICC UK](#) for London. Prayers can take up to 15 minutes to complete so breaks should be long enough to accommodate this.

Not all people of faith practice in the same way so it's important to be flexible with delegates so that each individual is aware of what is available to them, when breaks will be, and can make an informed choice about how they want to practice their faith.

Catering

Workplace culture surrounding food and drink can indirectly discriminate and make people with differing needs feel excluded.

If you are serving food or drinks you should make this clear to delegates beforehand and wherever possible ask them for dietary requirements. See Appendix 2 for example booking form.

Food

Many faiths observe certain dietary restrictions. As a broad guideline (although there will always be exceptions):

- Islamic dietary law forbids the consumption of pork products and alcohol; all meat must be 'halal' which means the meat is slaughtered in a specific manner. In the UK there are different organisations that can certify halal meat with the Halal Monitoring Committee (HMC) and the Halal Food Authority (HFA) being the two main bodies. The HMC is the more widely accepted body as such it is recommended that HMC certified meat is used to ensure all groups are accommodated. Please check the halal certificate when arranging an event.
- Orthodox Jews are forbidden to eat pork or shellfish, and meat and dairy products must not be cooked or consumed together – all food must be 'kosher'. Similar to halal food, this means that the meat must be prepared in a ritually acceptable manner. There are a number of Kosher Certification authorities in the UK including Badatz Igud Rabbonim and London Beth Din Kashrut Division (KLBD).

NB – if a product is kosher certified, it does not mean it is halal or vice versa

- Muslims and Jews can be hesitant to eat at functions that serve pork because of the fear that non-pork dishes may have come into contact with the pork at some stage
- Hinduism doesn't permit consumption of beef or alcohol; Hindus often do not eat any meat or fish and are often vegetarian and in some cases vegan
- Buddhists tend to be vegetarians
- Devout Sikhs may not eat meat or any animal by-products. Alcohol is forbidden.

As good practice, always serve a selection of vegetarian and meat dishes on separate tables/trays with separate serving utensils.

Make sure you have clear and detailed food labels indicating what is suitable for vegetarians, vegans, a halal/kosher diet etc, preferably with ingredients listed. For example vegetarians will not generally eat anything derived from animals including gelatine, animal fat and rennet that can be found in breads, desserts, cheese and a variety of other foods, and similarly alcohol is found in many desserts however this is not always obvious.

Also be aware that some of your guests may have food allergies that should be clearly labelled. Not having confidence that the food is safe for you to eat can be very excluding.

Beverages

In light of the restrictions on alcohol for many faiths, a variety of non-alcoholic drinks should always be available.

Those who don't drink may have concerns about alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks being served together. It is advisable to separate the areas serving alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks ideally with the main gathering separated from the area serving alcoholic drinks. If no-alcohol drinks are being served, you could consider serving them in bottles with glasses available. Some people do not want to use glassware that has been previously used for alcohol so leaving some drinks bottled may be helpful.

Further, many people who strictly adhere to a faith which prohibits alcohol will not be comfortable attending an event where alcohol will be served, particularly where it will form a central element of the event. This may be equally applicable to those dealing with or recovering from an alcohol addiction.

It needs to be made clear if alcohol will be served in advance of the event. If you are using an external venue for a business critical event or meeting, managers need to consider the needs of their team in advance of selecting a venue, so that, where possible venues are inclusive of individual needs.

Christian denominations such as Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists forbid the consumption of tea and coffee so always make water or other soft drinks available.

In summary a number of religions restrict not only what people consume, but also what their food/drink comes into contact with. In general it's best to provide certified vegetarian and vegan food (NB animal products like rennet) and always ask delegates what their dietary requirements are in advance and cater according to individual needs.

Speakers and special guests

When booking speakers you should be clear about the content that is appropriate for your organisation and delegates.

It is acceptable to have speakers who have religious beliefs or affiliations, but in a work context, it should be made clear that their beliefs should be expressed in a way that

would not cause offense or exclusion of any other group or person. It is recommended not to book any speaker whose views would be considered controversial.

It is always advised to only invite speakers who, have been recommended by a reliable source, are professionally employed as a public speaker, and have not preached any religious hatred, whether on social media or at other events. You could ask all speakers to sign a form to say that they agree to speak in accordance with the rules and values of your organisation.

It is also very important that in the event of any anti-faith comments being made, one of the event organisers or managers is able to respond appropriately and stop the speaker.

Awards/Gifts

At a number of events there is an awards or presentation element. Often the gifts comprise of alcohol. You may wish to consider alternatives to make this more inclusive.

Etiquette

When arranging events that are more informal in nature there may be aspects of social interaction, team bonding, introductions phase, etc. to be considered and you may wish to share this information with your hosts/delegates, for example, some Muslims choose not to have physical contact, such as shaking hands, with someone of the opposite sex as this is restricted within Islamic law.

If delegate packs are provided it may be worth mentioning some of the key arrangements that have been made to accommodate certain groups. For example whether there is a prayer room, its location and also what selection of food is available in terms of whether it is kosher/halal/vegetarian.

These points can also be mentioned at an appropriate point in the day, for example alongside other housekeeping arrangements.

Dress code can also be a factor that excludes people of faith. For example if the dress code is Black Tie, people who wear religious dress such as a niqab (Muslim) or sari (Hindu) may feel that they cannot fulfil this dress code whilst feeling comfortable in their

faith. It is advisable to write 'dress code: black tie or cultural dress' to let people know that the event is faith inclusive.

Other Resources

[Inclusive Employers: Information and guidance on workplace inclusion](#)

[CAIR – An Employers Guide to Islamic Religious Practices](#)

[Diversity Calendar](#)

[Religion or Belief in the workplace: A handbook – produced by ACAS](#)

[Religion and Employment - CIPD](#)

Further Information

Buddhism – [The Buddhist Society](#)

Christianity – [Christianity.com](#)

Hinduism – [The Hindu Forum of Britain](#)

Islam – [The Islamic Society of Britain](#)

Judaism – [The Board of Deputies of British Jews](#)

Sikhism – [Sikh Net](#)

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service - [ACAS](#)

[BBC Religion & Ethics](#)

[Faith Associates](#)

[Faith Matters](#)

FRF – [Faith in People](#)

[St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation & Peace](#)

Appendix 1 – Multi-faith Room Sign

Multi-faith Room

This room will be used between TIME and TIME hours as a multi-faith room for delegates attending the X event/conference.

Guidance

Please do

- Keep this space clean and tidy after use
- Remove any personal or religious objects after worship
- Remove your shoes before entering
- Be respectful of other faiths using this space. It may be necessary to wait your turn if someone of a different faith or gender is currently using the space
- Ask for assistance from a event organiser if you have any problems

Please do not

- Enter the space to take phone calls or use the space for any other purpose than worship, mediation or contemplation
- Make loud noises or disturb anyone using this space
- Interrupt someone's time of worship or contemplation
- Move or remove faith objects which do not belong to you
- Bring food or drink into the room

This space is available for use at anytime between the hours started above and the breaks in today's event will be at TIME & TIME.

Any questions please ask a member of the events team.

Appendix 2 – Example Booking Form

Thank you for booking to attend NAME OF EVENT on DATE at TIME. We hope that all delegates can have equal access and enjoyment of this event and we would appreciate it if you could complete the following booking form.

Name:

Telephone Number (we will only call you if we need to discuss disability and/or faith adjustments):

(You may want to also include workshop choices at this point if necessary to your event)

We will be providing food and drinks at the event. There will be alcoholic and soft drinks available. These drink options will be served separately but if you have any questions about the consumption of alcohol at this event please contact NAME, we will be happy to give further details.

(If there will be no food or no alcohol you should clearly state this on the booking form so that people of faith are informed)

Do you have dietary requirements?

Yes

No

Please specify (e.g. halal, vegan, allergy etc.):

Do you need access to a pray space?

Yes

No

Do you consider yourself to have access requirements?

Yes

No

If so, please detail any adjustments you will require:

If you have any question about the event people do not hesitate to contact NAME

Appendix 3 – Event Check List (Faith)

Has a multi-faith room been allocated?	
Have you place an arrow or information saying which way is southeast in the multi-faith room? (Optional/best practice)	
Have you provided helpful objects such as chairs, clear floor space, prayer matts/floor sheets, washing facilities? (Optional/best practice)	
Have you put a sign on the door?	
Have you schedule breaks that coincide with pray times?	
Have you informed delegates whether alcohol will be served?	
Have you asked delegates for dietary requirements?	
Have you catered for dietary needs?	
Is the catering separated and clearly labelled?	
Is there a presentation of gifts? Are they appropriate?	
Have you allowed flexible within the dress code?	
Have you mentioned faith considerations in the delegate pack?	