Faith and Belief Scotland

A Contemporary Mapping of Attitudes and Provisions in Scotland

THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

The Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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<u>www.faithandbeliefscotland.co.uk</u>

The views expressed in this report are those of the researchers and do not necessarily represent those of the Equality Unit or Scottish Ministers.

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Introduction

The nature of Scottish society is changing. Scotland is becoming more ethnically and religiously diverse. Within an equalities framework, consideration must be given to service provision for these changing demographics. The Public Sector Duty makes it incumbent upon all council jurisdictions to work towards eliminating "discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations".[1] Councils face the challenge of adhering to the Public Sector Duty in relation to the continual shifts in religion and belief demographics.

Aim

This project sought to assist councils in addressing such challenges by ascertaining the extent of council provision for people of religion and belief. Towards this end, it has endeavoured to gauge attitudes of people of religion and belief in relation to council provision and to offer an illustrative sampling of their opinion on a range of contemporary social issues. In doing so, the project provides systematic evidence that can be used to inform strategy and policy direction.

Methodology

The methodology used in the study combines both qualitative and quantitative approaches conducted in eight geographically disparate councils. These eight councils were Aberdeen City, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Dumfries and Galloway, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Highland, Orkney, and the Scottish Borders. Across these councils, the following was carried out:

- Eight single person in-depth, semi-structured interviews with council Equality Officers.
- Twenty-one semi-structured, "mixed" focus groups with people of religion and belief.
- Four semi-structured focus groups with people of belief only.
- Thirteen single-person interviews with people of religion and belief.

This data was further supplemented with the following:

- An evaluation of all thirty-two councils' *Equality Outcome Assessments* in relation to religion and belief.
- A "media-watch" of contemporary discourses surrounding religion and belief in Scottish society.
- Online survey for nationwide distribution (1407 completed responses)

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[1] *Scottish Ministers' proposals to enable the better performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2013-2017*, Scottish Government, December 2013, p.23.

The scope of this project was very broad. Research covered existing and original statistical information on a wide range of issues concerning religion and belief communities, policy issues, the "religious-secular-humanist" interface, and the local concerns and needs within communities in very different geographic locations. The width of coverage meant that no one area could be examined exhaustively. That said, the research entailed direct interaction with a wide range of individuals and groups from a diverse spectrum of religion and belief perspectives throughout Scotland. Furthermore, it also directly engaged with a wide array of council workers from geographically disparate locations, each facing distinct and very different challenges. This, alongside a nationwide online survey that received an excellent response rate, means that the findings represent a significant contribution to a timely consultation exercise.

Key findings

1. 59% of councils paid only "lip-service" to the protected characteristic of religion and belief in their *Equality Outcome Assessments.*
2. A majority of councils expressed a desire firstly, to know more about religion and belief groups, and, secondly, to have access to further specialist advice from religion and belief communities to help them negotiate issues as and when they arise.
3. 59% of people of religion and belief rated the wider community's understanding their religion and perspective as "poor" or "none at all."
4. 76% of people of religion and belief think it is important for their wider community to understand their religion and belief perspective.
5. Social attitudes *between* people of religion and belief are becoming increasingly polarized. This runs the potential risk of a "new sectarianism" developing.
6. 27% of people self-identified as a person of religion *and* belief; that is, self-identifying with a religion *and* humanism and/or secularism.
7. A large majority of respondents from both religion and belief groups expressed a recognition of the importance of "spirituality", however conceived. 75% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that it is important to take account of a person's spiritual care in healthcare, while 66% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" that there are things in life that we simply cannot explain through science or any other means.
8. Those working with an equalities remit within in councils came across as committed and conscientious. However, they expressed frustration that equalities is not yet embedded into the wider working culture of some councils. Rather, it is sometimes viewed as a "box-ticking" exercise.
9. Due to a lack of resources, a majority of council workers in equalities often found themselves doing the minimum of what was required – even when they would have liked to do more.
10. Council workers expressed frustration when the time and work they invested into a particular project, in collaboration with people of religion and belief, was rendered null and void due to changing council priorities. It was noted that this caused a lack of "buy-in" from people of religion and belief for future projects.

11. Councils sometimes struggle to obtain representatives from various religion and belief groups. This was noted to be the case particularly for some minority religion and belief groups.
12. A majority of people of religion felt that councils listen to, but do not respond to, or care about, the opinions of people of religion and belief.
13. A majority of members of minority religions rated their satisfaction with council service provision of religious food requirements as "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied".
14. People of religion expressed a desire for more faith specific services from councils.
15. People of belief expressed frustration at unelected religious representatives on education committees and the lack of accommodation for teaching humanism or atheism in schools.
16. People of belief expressed frustration at not being invited to various consultation events, in contrast to better established religious groups.

Conclusions and recommendations

1. The creation of a national advisory board constituted by government representatives and people of religion and belief to address areas of concern. This would also contribute towards improving knowledge and relations *between* religion and belief groups. It could also be rolled out in regional franchises.
2. The creation of an online resource where council workers, employers, teachers, and people of religion and belief can go to find accurate and reliable information about religion and belief. It would also contain contact details of people of religion and belief so that further expertise and advice could be sought.
3. Further research into the council provision for *individual* religion and belief groups throughout Scotland. This research would particularly target the services needs of often under-represented demographics such as women, young people, and the elderly.
4. With increasingly polarized social attitudes *between* religion and belief perspectives, which runs the potential risk of a "new sectarianism" developing, we strongly recommend initiatives that aim to foster dialogue and to encourage interaction *between* people of religion and belief to improve mutual understanding.
5. Within councils, mandatory equality training should be expanded to include existing staff and senior management with a view to systematically embed a culture of equalities.
6. The creation of a framework for councils to better assess their service provision for people of religion and belief with a view to improving the 59% of *Equality Outcome Assessments* that paid only "lip-service" to religion and belief. A mechanism for sharing best practice in relation to people of religion and belief across councils should also be established.
7. Reframe how councils think about religious food requirements by listing religious food options alongside already existing special dietary requirements (e.g. vegetarianism, gluten free) on forms. Appropriate

sources for these foods could be found in consultation with religious communities.

8. Councils should explore the viability of "get-out" clauses from the primary contracted services providers to enable provision for those who may wish to have a religion specific service.

9. Councils should do more to include people of belief. The best way to go about this should be determined in consultation with the *Humanist Society Scotland, Edinburgh Secular Society* (which is affiliated to the *National Secular Society*), and the *Scottish Secular Society*.

10. Patterns of consultation with people of religion and belief should be kept under continuous review to ensure appropriate proportionality between religion and belief in consultative processes and to discern the best practice for engagement.

11. To maintain "buy-in" into projects between people of religion and belief and the council, resources should, if possible, be "ring-fenced" to support the life span of a project from conception to completion.

Chapter I CONTEXT

1.1. Introduction

> "With a clear perception of the role and significance of religion or belief in the lives of individuals, communities and organizations, actions can be taken that will result in both a challenge to, and remedy for, unfair treatment on the basis of religion. Positive measures can then be taken at all levels of society to promote greater inclusivity, in which the distinctive contributions represented by all of its religion and belief traditions and communities will be welcomed and valued for the contribution that they can make to the common good."[2]

A comparison of the 2001 and 2011 Census results reveal that Scotland's population demographics are changing both ethnically and in relation to religion and belief.[3] Since April 2011, councils have come under the Public Sector Duty of The Equality Act (2010) which entails, "a duty to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations, which applies to public authorities and public functions."[4] The Equality Act (2010) also identifies the category of "religion and belief" as a protected characteristic. Councils are therefore faced with a twofold challenge of adhering to the Public Sector Duty in relation to changing religion and belief demographics – of which they must take due account.

This project sought to assist councils in addressing these challenges by ascertaining the extent of council provision for people of religion and belief, alongside gauging attitudes of people of religion and belief in relation to council provision and an illustrative sampling of attitudes regarding a number of contemporary social issues. In so doing, the project sought to provide systematic evidence to inform strategy and policy direction:

> "At the heart of our improvement agenda is a focus on eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations."[5]

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[2] Weller, P., *Religious discrimination in Britain: A review of research evidence, 2000-10*, Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011, p.55.
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2011_06/1308579619_73._Religious_discrimination_in_Britain.pdf
[3] See Table 1, p.8.
[4] 'Implementation of Public Sector Equality Duty',
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/PublicEqualityDuties. Cf. The 'Specific Duties' which came into force in May 2012, *Scottish Ministers' proposals to enable the better performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2013-2017*, Scottish Government, December 2013, p.15. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0044/00440910.pdf
[5] *Scottish Ministers' proposals to enable the better performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2013-2017*, Scottish Government, December 2013, p.3.
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0044/00440910.pdf

1.2.   Religion and belief as a protected characteristic

The Equality Act (2010) identifies the category of religion and belief as a protected characteristic. [6] It specifically defines religion and belief in the following terms:

> "Religion means any religion and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion."[7]

> "Belief means any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief."[8]

Paul Weller, Professor of Inter-Religious Relations at the University of Derby, has noted that delineating the category of religion and belief is an area that requires further development and definition.[9] He notes that following a 2009 series of seminars, the *Equality and Human Rights Commission* (EHRC) acknowledged that, in comparison to other equality strands, the Commission:

> "[H]ad limited knowledge about the key research and policy issues relating to religion and belief from an equalities and human rights perspective.   These seminars…highlighted that the interpretation of 'belief' is an area in significant need of further clarification."[10]

An additional problematic area has been identified by a research project led by sociologist of religion Linda Woodhead.   Woodhead's project was entitled, *Religion or Belief: Identifying Issues and Priorities* (2009)[11] and noted that:

> "[T]here is still an inadequate evidence base concerning religious discrimination (as well as no evidence whether there is

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[6] *The Equality Act (2010)*, Part II, Chapter 1, 10.

[7] *The Equality Act (2010)*, Part II, Chapter 1, 10.1. Please see Chapter III, "Methodology" for a discussion of how these terms are understood for the purposes of this study.

[8] *The Equality Act (2010)*, Part II, Chapter 1, 10.2. Please see Chapter III, "Methodology" for a discussion of how these terms are understood for the purposes of this study. Cf. Paul Weller's assertion that "belief" also "relates to the as yet clearly to be developed and defined meaning of the 'non-religious' in this field of policy and practice", Weller, P. (PI), *Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales: Theory, Policy and Practice (2000-2010)*, 2010, p.7, http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/religion_and_belief_-_discrimination_and_equality_in_england_and_wales_full_project_details.pdf

[9] Weller, P. (PI), *Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales: Theory, Policy and Practice (2000-2010)*, 2010, p.7, http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/religion_and_belief_-_discrimination_and_equality_in_england_and_wales_full_project_details.pdf

[10] Weller, P. (PI), *Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales: Theory, Policy and Practice (2000-2010)*, 2010, p.8, http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/religion_and_belief_-_discrimination_and_equality_in_england_and_wales_full_project_details.pdf

[11] Woodhead, L., *et al. 'Religion or belief': Identifying issues and priorities*, Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009. http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/publication/research-report-48-religion-or-belief-identifying-issues-and-priorities

discrimination against secular belief, or at least against secularism)."[12]

It is envisaged that this project will contribute to these on-going discourses surrounding the definitions of religion and belief, and their interactions with each other, by gauging attitudes of different people of the diverse religion and belief affiliations throughout Scotland.

1.3. Religion and belief as a human right

The background of the identification of religion and belief as a protected characteristic resides in Article 18 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), which states:

> "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."[13]

The human right articulated by Article 18 is, however, conditioned in its original documentation by Article 29.2[14] and, of more direct significance to this study, the subsequent statements passed on this right by the UN's *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966).[15] Of these four supplementary statements[16] to

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[12] Woodhead, L., *et al. 'Religion or belief': Identifying issues and priorities*, Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009, p.15; 32. http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/publication/research-report-48-religion-or-belief-identifying-issues-and-priorities; Cf. Paul Weller, *Religious discrimination in Britain: A review of research evidence, 2000-10*, Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2011, p.52.
http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2011_06/1308579619_73._Religious_discrimination_in_Britain.pdf

[13] Article 18, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948).
http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

[14] "In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respects for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society", Article 29.2, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948). http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

[15] *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966),
http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/ccpr.pdf.

[16] These read: "(1) Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his [her] choice, and freedom either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his [her] religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. (2) No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his [her] freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his [her] choice. (3) Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. (4) The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians, to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions." Article 18.1-4, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/ccpr.pdf.

Article 18, paragraph 3 reiterates the themes of Article 29.2 of the original 1948 *Declaration*, namely, that the:

> "Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others."[17]

The human right of religion and belief is therefore a "conditioned" right that can be limited by law to the extent necessary to protect the fundamental rights and freedoms of others. This idea of "proportionality" between various differing, and sometimes competing, human rights is increasingly entering into public discourse. Councils are not immune from these discussions. Indeed, as Scotland's religion and belief demographics continue to change, councils increasingly find themselves at the heart of such discussions.

1.4. Scotland's changing demographics

The 2011 Census results in Scotland revealed Scotland to have a population of 5,295,403 people (see Table 1).[18] This represented a 5% increase since the 2001 Census. The 2011 Census results further revealed that some 17% of the population was not born in Scotland. Of that 17%, 10% came from other "home nations", while 7% (369,000) were not born within the United Kingdom.[19] Indeed, the 2011 Census notes that:

> "Every council area of Scotland, saw an increase between 2001 and 2011 in the proportion of their population who were born outside the UK."[20]

The 2011 Census also revealed 54% of people stated their religion as Christian. This represents an 11% decrease from those identifying as Christian in the 2001 Census. By contrast, there was a 9% increase from the 2001 Census in the number of people claiming no religion – this was up from 28% in 2001 to 37% in 2011. It should be noted, however, that not all religions, including at least one Christian denomination, displayed signs of contraction from the 2001 to the 2011 Census, as the following table shows:[21]

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[17] Article 18.3, *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/ccpr.pdf.

[18] *2011 Census: Key Results on Population, Ethnicity, Identity, Language, Religion, Health, Housing and Accommodation in Scotland - Release 2A*, A National Statistics publication for Scotland, p.2. http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/StatsBulletin2A.pdf

[19] The home nations breakdown was as follows: 9 per cent England, 0.7 per cent Northern Ireland, and 0.3 per cent Wales. *2011 Census: Key Results on Population, Ethnicity, Identity, Language, Religion, Health, Housing and Accommodation in Scotland - Release 2A*, A National Statistics publication for Scotland, p.3. http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/StatsBulletin2A.pdf

[20] *2011 Census: Key Results on Population, Ethnicity, Identity, Language, Religion, Health, Housing and Accommodation in Scotland - Release 2A*, A National Statistics publication for Scotland, p.3.

[21] The data from the subsequent table has been reproduced from "Table 7: Religion, Scotland, 2001 and 2011," in *2001 Census: Key Results on Population, Ethnicity, Identity, Language, Health, Housing and Accommodation in Scotland – Release 2A*, A National Statistics publication for

2001			2011		Change in Number 2001-2011
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	
All people	**5,062,000**	**100.0**	**5,295,000**	**100.0**	**233,000**
Church of Scotland	2,146,000	42.4	1,718,000	32.4	-428,000
Roman Catholic	804,000	15.9	841,000	15.9	37,000
Other Christian	347,000	6.9	291,000	5.5	-56,000
Buddhist	7,000	0.1	13,000	0.2	6,000
Hindu	6,000	0.1	16,000	0.3	11,000
Jewish	6,000	0.1	6,000	0.1	-1,000
Muslim	43,000	0.8	77,000	1.4	34,000
Sikh	7,000	0.1	9,000	0.2	2,000
Other religion	8,000	0.2	15,000	0.3	7,000
No religion	1,409,000	27.8	1,941,000	36.7	532,000
Religion not stated	279,000	5.5	368,000	7.0	89,000

Table 1: Table showing comparison of 2001 and 2011 Scotland Census results

On the basis of the comparison in Table 1, if these demographic trends persist, Scotland's religion and belief demographics will continue to change. Accordingly,

> "There is a need to consider monitoring by religion and belief in assessing the extent to which strategies and policies are being implemented in ways that are inclusive of religious diversity."[22]

Scotland, p.32. cf. Footnote 1: "The data for 2001 for the 'Other religion' and 'No religion' categories have been amended for 2001 to match the 2011 coding, as some responses which were coded as 'Other religion' in 2001 have been coded as 'No religion' in 2011." http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/StatsBulletin2A.pdf

[22] Beckford, J. A. *et al. Review of the Evidence Base on Faith Communities*, London: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, 2006, p.88.

CHAPTER II   AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1.   Introduction

The research aims and objectives of this project were established by a tender put forward to the Equality Unit of the Scottish Government by the School of Divinity at the University of Edinburgh. This tender sought to assist the Equality Unit of the Scottish Government to understand better the changing demographic of religion and belief in contemporary Scottish society, and particularly how this relates to the Public Sector Duty[23] of The Equality Act (2010) which came into force in April 2011.[24] Informed research and feedback are specifically identified as a means to improve effectiveness and "to foster the national collaboration needed to promote equality."[25]   The purpose of this study is to provide systematic evidence to inform strategy and policy direction:

> "At the heart of our improvement agenda is a focus on eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations."[26]

The study was nationwide in scope with a view to better understand more fully how Scottish geography affects both religion and belief demographics, and council public sector duty. A particular emphasis was placed on better understanding the challenges, if any, faced by councils in rural settings outside Scotland's central belt in delivering public sector duty to their diverse religion and belief demographic.   It specifically investigated eight geographically disparate councils by means of qualitative and quantitative engagement. These eight councils were Aberdeen City, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Dumfries and Galloway, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Highland, Orkney, and the Scottish Borders. The remaining twenty-four councils were evaluated on the basis of their Equality Outcome Reports.

2.2.   Research aim

The research aim of the project was to investigate the attitudes to provision for people of religion and belief in contemporary Scotland.

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[23] *The Equality Act (2010)*, particularly, Part 11, Chapters 1&2.

[24] 'Implementation of Public Sector Equality Duty', http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/PublicEqualityDuties. Cf. The "Specific Duties" which came into force in May 2012, *Scottish Ministers' proposals to enable the better performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2013-2017*, Scottish Government, December 2013, p.15. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0044/00440910.pdf

[25] *Scottish Ministers' proposals to enable the better performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2013-2017*, Scottish Government, December 2013, p.2. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0044/00440910.pdf

[26] *Scottish Ministers' proposals to enable the better performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2013-2017*, Scottish Government, December 2013, p.3. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0044/00440910.pdf

Objectives

The objectives sought to identify and assess:

1. *Council provision for people of religion and belief.*

2. *Perceived level of council provision amongst people of religion and belief.*

3. *Challenges faced by council workers in service provision for people of religion and belief.*

4. *Perceptions and attitudes of religion and belief groups on a range of social issues prominent in contemporary Scottish public discourse.*

The scope of this project was very broad. It covered existing and original statistical information on a wide range of issues concerning religion and belief communities, policy issues, the "religious-secular-humanist" interface, and the local concerns and needs within communities in very different geographic locations. The width of coverage meant that no one area could be examined exhaustively. That said, the research entailed direct interaction with a wide range of individuals and groups from a diverse spectrum of religion and belief perspectives throughout Scotland. Furthermore, it also directly engaged with a wide array of council workers from geographically disparate locations, each facing distinct and very different challenges. This, alongside a nationwide online survey, which received an excellent response rate, means that the project represents a significant and timely consultation exercise.

The research findings that pertain directly to councils, that is, objectives one to three, are presented in *Section I: Focus on councils* in chapter four. The research findings that pertain directly to perceptions and attitudes of religion and belief groups on a range of social issues prominent in contemporary Scottish public discourse, that is, objective four, are presented in *Section II: Social attitudes of people of religion and belief* in chapter four.

CHAPTER III   METHODOLOGY

3.1.   Introduction

Formal consultation with religion and belief groups is an area that can entail particular methodological issues. The wide scope of this study, including policy, perception of policy, and ascertaining religion and belief attitudes in geographically disparate locations, presented a number of methodological challenges which required consultative decisions with stakeholders in order to best achieve the research objectives.

3.2.   Methodological challenges in consulting people of religion and belief

It has already been noted in chapter one that delineating the categories of religion and belief, as defined in The Equality Act (2010), is an emerging area and one that may require further development and definition.[27] As we have seen in chapter one, The Equality Act (2010) defines the protected characteristics of religion and belief in the following terms:

> "Religion means any religion and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion."[28]

> "Belief means any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief."[29]

The first methodological challenge was, therefore, that of categorizing of different religion and belief groups.

3.2.1. Religion

In categorizing this group, it was decided to adopt *Interfaith Scotland*'s freely available handbook *A Guide to Faith Communities in Scotland*.[30] This handbook lists nine religions, namely: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Sikhism, The Baha'i Faith, Brahma Kumaris, and Paganism. While these were the primary categories adopted to categorize religion, the option was made available for participants to self-identify as either having multiple religious identities or a predominately "other" single religious identity.

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[27] Weller, P. (PI), *Religion and Belief, Discrimination and Equality in England and Wales: Theory, Policy and Practice (2000-2010)*, 2010, p.7, http://www.derby.ac.uk/files/religion_and_belief_-_discrimination_and_equality_in_england_and_wales_full_project_details.pdf
[28] *The Equality Act (2010)*, Part II, § 1, 10.1.
[29] *The Equality Act (2010)*, Part II, Chapter 1, 10.2.
[30] *A Guide to Faith Communities in Scotland*
http://www.interfaithscotland.org/resources/publications/

3.2.2. Belief

In categorizing this group, advice was sought from various organizations and individuals who self-identified as humanist, secularist, both humanist and secularist, or none of the above.

At the time of consultation, and in relation to humanism, a number of those consulted expressed the view that "belief" was the likely definition that humanism would fall under in the Scottish Government's (at that time) forthcoming *Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act*.[31] However, some dissatisfaction was expressed with the category of belief and it was clearly stressed that many humanists would not like to define any position they may hold as a "belief". Moreover, while attention was drawn to the *Amsterdam Declaration 2002* of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, where it was strongly stressed that humanism manifests itself in diverse ways.[32] More satisfaction was expressed with humanism being defined as a life philosophy. The protected characteristic of belief within *The Equality Act* (2010) makes provision for "philosophical belief".[33] On the basis of this, consultations with humanist representatives and individuals, and the precedent soon to be set by the *Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act* (2014), the decision was therefore taken to categorize humanism in the "belief" category.

In relation to secularism, a number of those consulted also expressed the view that secularism was a political philosophy and not a belief system. The philosophical nature of secularism was often emphasized alongside the position that it was something supplementary to existing beliefs or religious outlooks. Accordingly, it was often expressed that it is possible to be both religious and secular. It was advised that flexibility for multiple self-identifications be ensured. On the basis of these consultations, it was acknowledged that attempting to categorize secularism under a belief category is problematic for many people who self-identify as secularists. Nonetheless, given that the philosophical dimension of secularism was something frequently highlighted, and that the protected characteristic of belief within *The Equality Act* (2010) makes provision for "philosophical belief", the decision was therefore taken to categorize secularism, like humanism, in the "belief" category.[34]

In both consultations with humanist and secularist organizations and individuals, it was stressed that humanism and secularism are often overlapping self-identifications. Moreover, it was equally stressed that a distinction should be made between those actively affiliated with organizations such as the *Scottish Secular Society*, the *Edinburgh Secular Society*, and the *Humanist Society Scotland*, and those who consider themselves "unaffiliated" but still secular, or humanist, or both.

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[31] Since the initial consultations, this Act has been passed: *Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act* 2014, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2014/5/pdfs/asp_20140005_en.pdf

[32] The Amsterdam Declaration 2002, http://www.humanism-scotland.org.uk/content/amsterdam_declaration_2002/

[33] *The Equality Act (2010)*, Part II, Chapter 1, 10.2.

[34] *The Equality Act (2010)*, Part II, Chapter 1, 10.2.

3.2.3. Representation of participants

With any consultation of any community, the question of how representative the participant sample is of the wider community is an essential point to bear in mind. One must also be open to the possibility that there may be a difference in opinion between leaders of communities or organizations and individual grassroots members. Furthermore, it must also be recognized that there may a sizeable number of individuals who self-identify with a religion or belief perspective, but not with any religion or belief organization or community.

There are a number of practical challenges to the issue of representation. A key issue is that researchers are dependent upon the willingness of volunteers to engage with the project and to give their time to it. Daily life obligations can sometimes prevent participants from engaging, even if they were inclined to do so. Other issues may include reluctance by some groups to participate due to "consultation overload", issues surrounding language competence and literacy, and concerns about confidentiality.[35] Issues of religion and belief can also involve a good deal of personal investment and strength of feeling. Given that consultations are dependent upon people freely volunteering their time, there must also be an awareness that sample representation may be impacted upon by these variables.

3.2.4. Geography

The research objective to engage both councils and people of religion and belief in geographically disparate councils presented some unique challenges in terms of gaining access to organizations and communities. Considerable time was invested in gaining access to some of the more rural contexts. However, this time investment was expected, particularly as many of the people contacted were volunteering their time with limited availability. The work of *Interfaith Scotland* in supporting a network of local interfaith groups throughout Scotland proved to be an invaluable first point of contact for some rural areas.[36]

3.2.5. Special considerations

In 2004, the Home Office published recommendations that advised that special effort should be made to include demographics that are frequently under-represented in consultation processes, namely: women, young people, and older people.[37] While the Home Office report, in its original emphasis, concerns only religious communities, it was deemed pertinent to expand the recommendation out to all people of religion and belief in this project.

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[35] Knott, K., *et al*, *Leeds pilot faiths consultation on restorative justice and the rehabilitation of young male ex-offenders: Final Report*, January 2004, pp.6-7.
[36] "Local Interfaith Groups", http://www.interfaithscotland.org/interfaith-groups/
[37] *Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities*, London: Home Office Faith Communities Unit, February 2004, paragraphs 2.2.31-2.2.34.

3.3. Methodological framework

The objectives of this project sought to identify and assess:

1. *Council provision for people of religion and belief.*

2. *Perceived level of council provision by people of religion and belief.*

3. *Challenges faced by council workers in service provision for people of religion and belief.*

4. *Perceptions and attitudes of religion and belief groups on a range of social issues prominent in contemporary Scottish public discourse.*

The methodology for this study combined both qualitative and quantitative elements. Across our eight selected councils[38], the following was carried out:

- Eight single person in-depth, semi-structured interviews with council Equality Officers.
- 21 semi-structured, "mixed" focus groups with people of religion and belief.
- 4 semi-structured focus groups with people of belief only.
- 13 single-person interviews with people of religion and belief.

This data was further supplemented with the following:

- An evaluation of all thirty-two councils' *Equality Outcome Assessments* in relation to religion and belief.
- A "media-watch" of contemporary discourses surrounding religion and belief in Scottish society.
- Online survey for nationwide distribution (1407 completed responses)

In relation to council provision, interviews were carried out to ascertain the opinions of the Equality Officers, within the selected councils, to understand better the challenges, if any, that they may face in providing for people of religion and belief. This was done with a view to discern better ways to support Equality Officers as they carry out their remit in relation to religion and belief. Their perspectives were then compared with the evaluation of the Equality Outcomes Assessments for all thirty-two councils. Finally, focus groups consisting of a diverse mix of people of religion and belief were held to ascertain the perception of council provision among people of faith and belief. The approach sought to juxtapose a "top-down" perspective alongside a "bottom-up" grassroots perspective.

So as to gain the broadest range of opinions as possible from people of religion and belief, and very much aware of the methodological challenges in consulting

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[38] These eight councils were Aberdeen City, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles), Dumfries and Galloway, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Highland, Orkney, and the Scottish Borders.

people of religion and belief, we employed a flexible strategy with the focus groups. The minimum requirement was to have *at least* one focus group consisting of people of religion and belief in each of our selected councils and, ideally, these focus groups would have a mix of gender and age. It was preferred to keep numbers between four and eight participants in order to enable a more in-depth discussion. While that was our minimum attainment, we equally made ourselves available to hold as many focus groups as there were willing participants. The only major constraint to this was cost-effectiveness within the project's budget. So, for example, if more than one focus group was desired, we scheduled them at the same time that the project researcher was in that council to avoid repeat trips. We also made ourselves available for single person interviews, an approach that proved useful given the geographical distances involved in some of the more rural councils.

The focus groups were advertised through various religion and belief mailing lists, hard copy posters sent to public libraries and community centres, and, particularly in rural areas, advertisements in local newspapers. In total, 178 people volunteered their time to provide their opinion. The methodology of engagement was as follows:

- Twenty-one mixed groups with people of religion and belief
- Four groups with people of belief only
- Thirteen single person interviews

Of these 178 people, 59% were male and 41% were female. One rural focus group was entirely female. Of the thirteen single-person interviews, four were female and nine were male.

For both the focus groups and the interviews, it was stressed to participants that all contributions would be kept completely anonymous. Accordingly, data collected from the focus groups and council interviews has been amalgamated and is not referenced to a specific group or location. This is to preserve anonymity given that some religion and belief perspectives may be a minority within a particular location and therefore potentially identifiable.

In order to supplement the focus groups, and to gain as wide a perspective as possible on religion and belief, an online nationwide survey containing fifty questions was created. The questions for this survey were based on a six-month "media-watch", which monitored issues of religion and belief in contemporary Scottish society. Some of the questions in the survey adopted the wording of the 2011 Census in order to enable comparisons. Similarly, some questions on spirituality were adopted from the questionnaire which formed the basis a recent project carried out in England, entitled *The Spirit of Things Unseen: belief in post-religious Britain* (2013).[39] The online survey was distributed through various religion and belief mailing lists and popular social media platforms.

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[39] *The Spirit of Things Unseen: belief in post-religious Britain,* London: Theos, 2013, http://www.theosthinktank.co.uk/files/files/Reports/Spirit%20of%20Things%20-%20Digital%20(update).pdf Permissions to use these questions were obtained. This report was

Profile of respondents in the online survey

The online nationwide survey received 1407 completed responses with respondents from all thirty-two councils. This represents an 80% completion rate (1407/1751). The general demographic of respondents were as follows.
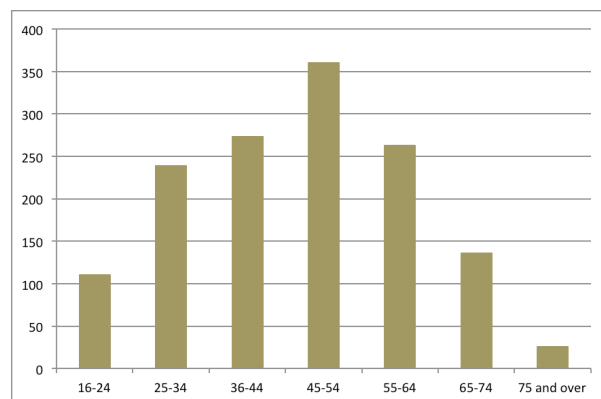

Chart 1: Age range distribution of participants

Respondents to the online survey were almost equally distributed between male (51%) and female (49%) (Table 2 below). They were well spread over the age ranges with a majority (26%) falling into the 45-54 year old age group (Chart 1). The vast majority of respondents (75.3%) reported living in Scotland for 21 years or more (Table 3). Respondents came from all thirty-two council jurisdictions with Glasgow (18.3%) and Edinburgh (16.7%) accounting for the highest respondent rate and Shetland (0.2%) and Inverclyde (0.8%) accounting for the lowest respondent rate (Chart 2).

	Total	16-24 (% of total)	25-34 (% of total)	36-44 (% of total)	45-54 (% of total)	55-64 (% of total)	65-74 (% of total)	75 and over (% of total)
Male	718 (51%)	54 (3.8%)	109 (7.7%)	134 (9.5%)	180 (12.8%)	142 (10.1%)	77 (5.5%)	22 (1.6%)
Female	689 (49%)	56 (4.0%)	130 (9.2%)	139 (9.9%)	180 (12.8%)	121 (8.6%)	59 (4.2%	4 (0.3%)
Total	1407 (100%	110 (7.8%)	239 (17.0%)	273 (19.4%	360 (25.6%)	263 (18.7%)	136 (9.7%)	26 (1.8%)

Table 2: Gender and age ranges of participants.

Length of time living in Scotland	Frequency (%)
0-5 years	133 (9.5%)
6-10 years	89 (6.3%)
11-15 years	67 (4.8%)
16-20 years	58 (4.1%)
over 21 years	259 (18.4%)
all my life	801 (56.9%)
Total	1407 (100.0%)

Table 3: Distribution and length of time participants have lived in Scotland

limited to England and the authors were happy to share their questions to enable a comparison of spirituality in England with spirituality in Scotland.
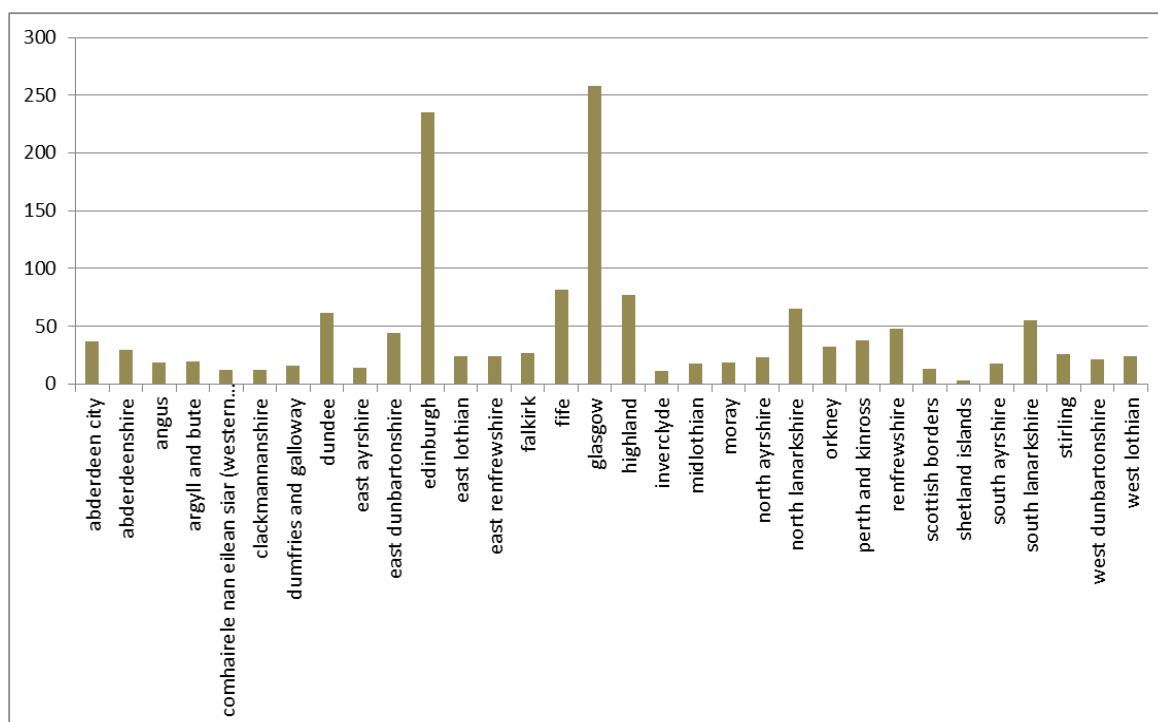
Chart 2: Respondents present residence by council

Of these 1407 completed responses from across the thirty-two council jurisdictions, respondent self-identification revealed four major groups. The largest self-identification was "religion only" at 41.1%, followed by "belief only" at 20.3%. Interestingly, 27.2% of respondents identified with both "religion" *and* "belief", while 11.4% of respondents identified with *neither* "religion" nor "belief" (see Table 4 and Chart 3):

	Frequency (%)
Religious Group Only	578 (41.1%)
Belief Group Only	285 (20.3%)
Combined Religious and Belief Group	383 (27.2%)
None Religious or Belief Group	161 (11.4%)
Total	1407 (100%)

Table 4: Total sample by religious/belief group
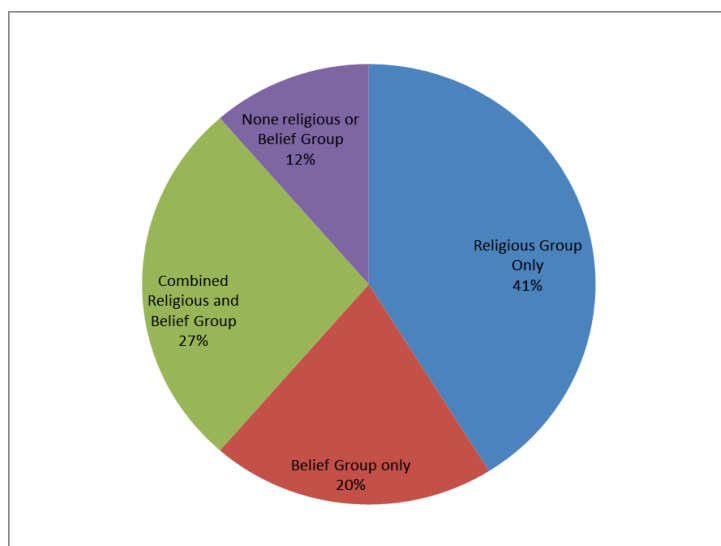
Chart 3: Total sample by religious/belief group %

Each of these four main groups contain a number of subcategories. The largest sub-category for religion was the "none" category at 31.7%. However, a majority of this category identified with a "belief" group. Compensating for this, the largest sub-category for religion was "other religion" at 26.4% and the smallest was the "Brahma Kumaris" at 0.2% (Table 5). The largest category for belief was the "other" category at 17.4%. However, a majority of these 17.4% respondents chose "other" in the belief category and then wrote in their religion. Compensating for this, the largest sub-category for belief was "combination" at 9.9%. That is, respondents who self-identified with both humanism and secularism. The smallest sub-category was "secular affiliated" at 2.6%. It should be noted that 0.5% (7 respondents) skipped this question altogether (Table 6).

	Religion Frequency (%)
None	446 (31.7%)
Church of Scotland	242 (17.2%)
Roman Catholicism	98 (7.0%)
Islam	45 (3.2%)
Buddhism	14 (1.0%
Sikhism	12 (0.9%)
Judaism	20 (1.4%)
Hinduism	11 (0.8%)
Brahma Kumaris	3 (0.2%)
Paganism	138 (9.8%)
Baha'i Faith	9 (0.6%)
Other religion	369 (26.4%)
Total	1407 (100.0%)

Table 5: Breakdown of religion respondents

	Belief Frequency (%)
None	736 (52.3%)
Humanist affiliated	129 (9.2%)
Humanist non-affiliated	50 (3.6%)
Secular affiliated	37 (2.6%)
Secular non affiliated	64 (4.5%)
other	245 (17.4%)
combination[40]	139 (9.9%)
Missing	7 (0.5%)
Total	1407 (100.0)

Table 6: Breakdown of belief respondents

[40] By "combination", we refer to people who identified with two or more of the belief categories, that is, two or more from the following list: humanist affiliated, humanist non-affiliated, secular affiliated, secular non-affiliated.

Chapter IV   RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1.   Introduction

The research findings are split into two sections. The first section seeks to meet the first three research objectives pertaining to perception of council provision, while the second section seeks to meet the fourth research objective pertaining to social attitudes of people of religion and belief. The data is drawn from the nationwide online survey, focus groups and interviews with people of religion and belief, and interviews with council workers involved in equalities.

4.2.   Section I: Focus on councils

4.2.1. Survey findings

The online survey asked respondents to rate their level of satisfaction in relation to a range of council services such as nursery schools, schools, and provision for religious food requirements. As well as listing degrees of satisfaction, we included an "other" option to allow respondents to provide feedback by way of a comment box. This question had a 99.4% completion rate from the 1407 survey respondents. A statistical analysis revealed that there was very little difference in levels of satisfaction between religion and belief groups in relation to council services with one major exception; it was found that there was a significant difference between religion and belief in relation to council provision of religious food requirements.[41] For example, 16.2% of respondents who identified with the religion category rated their satisfaction of council provision of religious food requirements as being "dissatisfied" or "very dissatisfied." By contrast this figure was only 8.4% in relation to respondents who identified with the belief category.

Of the total of 1,398 (99.4% of respondents) who choose to answer this question, 73 people (5.2%) opted to add further comment by completing the "other" box. Of these, two themes accounted for 14% and 12% of the responses respectively. The first theme, accounting for 14% of the responses, expressed a frustration with the privileging of religion in schools. The following is a representative sample of these responses:

> "I am dissatisfied with the make-up of education committees and their need to include (in Aberdeen) three reps from religious groups. I am also not happy with the need to include a religious service in schools and unhappy about the inclusion and presentation of eg [sic] Virgin birth nativity events as if they were fact. Children and young people should be taught about religions, belief and non-belief and encouraged to question the established church and beliefs, while remaining tolerant of the beliefs of others. Education and public services

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[41] Belief group differences ($\chi^2(6, n = 1405) = 18.113$, $p = 0.006$; religious group differences ($\chi^2(10, n = 1405) = 45.705$, $p < 0.001$.

> should be secular. Religion is a private and family matter, not one for the state."

> "I see no accommodation of Humanism or Atheism within our education system. In a country that is the home of "The Enlightenment", I am very saddened. Religious groups' and C of S [i.e., Church of Scotland] ministers' access to Primary and Secondary pupils without question is a great concern especially in a country with an increasing number of non-religious. Religous [sic] privilege does not belong in the 21st century."

The second theme accounted for 12% of responses and expressed a frustration at the provisions made for religious food requirements. The following is a representative sample of these responses:

> "There seems to be very little understanding of the fact that there are many ethnic minorities who are not vegetarian but do not eat halal or kosher meat i.e. Hindu and Sikhs, even although some organizations have been stating this fact for over 20 years, it still has not been taken on board. Involvement at ground level when hospitals were being built, seminars etc [sic] on what should be included in hospitals re food and still any Asian going into hospital is given Halal food without question and when they refuse the food a salad is dumped on them. We are tax payers and it is about time authorities realised this, our children and old people have a right to a service that caters for their needs also, not one size fits all."

> "Provision of non pork food in hospital lamentable, and needs adequate training of staff choosing for those patients who have lost their comprehension or consciousness. Appalling lack of choice for vegetarians, and again singular lack of understanding regarding pork gelatine in deserts etc."

A few respondents also explicitly wrote to praise their councils for their "remarkable" library services and adult learning opportunities (Glasgow City Council) and for their promotion and support of recycling (Aberdeen City Council).

4.2.2. Council findings

The range of opinion concerning council provision for religion and belief was something that received more thorough reflection and feedback in the focus groups and interviews with council workers with a remit for equalities. This section will firstly look at findings from the councils and then proceed to look at the perceived level of council provision by people of religion and belief.

4.2.2.1.   Council perspectives: quantitative

An evaluation was conducted, specifically in relation to religion and belief, of the most recent *Equalities Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes* from all thirty-two councils.   This evaluation revealed a wide range of difference concerning the extent to which councils engaged with the category of religion and belief, as illustrated in Table 7:

Extent of council engagement with the protected characteristic of religion & belief	No. (/32)	%
No mention at all	3	9
Mentioned only[42]	16	50
Mentioned & included religion & belief council demographics	2	6
Mentioned & included description/examples of provision	5	16
Mentioned, & included description/examples of provision, & religion and belief council demographics	6	19

Table 7: Table showing the extent of council engagement with the protected characteristic of religion and belief in the recent council Equality Outcomes exercise

While 59% of councils only mentioned, or did not mention at all, the protected characteristic of religion and belief, it should be acknowledged that some of the reports from the top 19% demonstrated a high level of commitment to best practice in this area. For example:

> "A DVD has been developed that includes short workplace scenarios related to six of the nine 'protected characteristics' identified in The Equality Act 2010. This DVD will be rolled out to all employees across Aberdeenshire and is aimed at ensuring all employees have a better understanding of what is meant by equality and diversity, are more aware of their attitudes and beliefs when responding to colleagues and customers, and have an understanding about the challenges facing people from different groups."[43]

Such initiatives fit well within the insistence of the *Scottish Ministers' proposal to enable the better performance of Public Sector Equality Duty 2013-2017* that at,

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[42] By "mentioned only", we refer to the fact that the category of religion and belief was mentioned, normally in a list with the other protected characteristics, but then not substantively engaged with thereafter.

[43] *Aberdeenshire's Equalities Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes 2013-2017*, p.15.
http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/Equalities/MainstreamingReportanEqualityOutcomes.pdf

"the heart of our improvement agenda is a focus on eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations".[44] They also stand in stark contrast with the 59% of councils that either "only mentioned" or "did not mention at all" the religion and belief category in their Equality Outcomes.

4.2.2.2. Council perspectives: qualitative

As noted in chapter three, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with council workers holding equality remits were held in eight geographically disparate council jurisdictions. The responses from these interviews can be categorized as follows:

1. Perception and knowledge of Equalities within some councils
2. Obstacles in council provision for people of religion and belief

4.2.2.2.1. Perception and knowledge of equalities within some councils

A number of those council workers interviewed highlighted that the awareness of a need for equality strategies was often poor and that equalities was sometimes viewed negatively within councils. For example, in relation to equalities training, a number of interviewees (75%) echoed, in various ways, the sentiments of the following statements:

> "The thing is, for new people coming into posts, they'll get it [that is, equality training], for people who are already in posts, and there's a number of people like that, it is open to everybody but it's not compulsory. So they're not made to go on it, which is something that my area has been fighting for, that this training has to be compulsory and reviewed every couple of years. You know, as, I mean a lot of people won't even be aware of the new equality act and the changes and the new strands that we need to, we need to consider."

> "I'm viewed as the person who turns a five minute meeting into, emm a, a 20 minute one. This doesn't go down well, but like I'm just trying to do my job. We, we have an obligation to do this stuff but a lot of people just don't understand that. They think its just politically correct nonsense that holds things up."

> "How serious equality is taken seems to have a lot to do with how supportive your line manager is…[pause]…this is definitely anonymous right? [researcher: 'yes, completely anonymous']…my previous line manager was a nightmare, he just didn't see the point in equalities and, you know,

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[44] *Scottish Ministers' proposals to enable the better performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2013-2017*, Scottish Government, December 2013, p.3.
http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/0044/00440910.pdf

> considered it a box ticking exercise. He wasn't very supportive…[pause]…it was very disheartening. My new manager is much better."

> "It's like equalities is viewed as something you just add on at the end. We need to change things so it's at the heart of everything we do. It should be ingrained into council culture and, and all our processes. But, but, you know, I'm not sure how you go about doing that…[pause]…more compulsory training might help but we just don't have the resources to do that. And I don't think people would be willing."

All interviewees, except one, expressed similar sentiments concerning the perception and knowledge of equalities within councils. 50% of interviewees expressed a similar sentiment that their job would be made easier if management higher up in councils underwent equality training:

> "Particularly, at service manager, head of service, you know the level who are doing the policy direction, who are doing [sic], more people on the front line are aware of the requirements than further up. But they're the ones who are writing the policies."

A majority of interviewees (87.5%) expressed the desire to have more resources to enable them to carry out their equality remits and to enable, for example, the hiring of research officers to report on particular protected characteristics. As one interviewee summarized:

> "It would be nice to have the resources to adhere to best practice rather than just minimum requirements which is what we tend to, we to just do the minimum of what is required of us."

4.2.2.2.2.   Obstacles in council provision for people of religion and belief

A number of those council workers interviewed highlighted that in trying to ascertain the needs of people of religion and belief, they faced a number of obstacles. These obstacles can be categorized as "representation", "buy-in", and "knowledge of religion and belief".

4.2.2.2.3.   Representation

One of the major problems expressed by a majority (62.5%) of council worker interviewees was that of "representation". In some council areas, it was noted that the diversity of Christian denominations is often not mirrored in other religion and belief groups. Moreover, it was noted in some council areas that sectarianism and intra-Christian schism meant that it was difficult to obtain a single representative to provide a "Christian" voice. Where an effort was made to include various denominations in these council areas, it was often (but not

always) noted that these sectarian divisions and intra-Christian schismatic perspectives were often carried over into the consultative process. This, it was noted, made coming to any form of consensus particularly problematic. It was felt by a majority of interviewees (62.5%) that such intra-Christian disputes sometimes tended to drown out the voices of other religious minorities.

A number of interviewees (50%) also noted that "some groups are more established than others and are more willing to participate". This sentiment was expressed not only in relation to various minority religions but also, in 37.5% of interviewees, an awareness that humanist views were under-represented within that particular council jurisdiction.

The question as to "who" was the authoritative representative of a religion and belief group, alongside how representative that person was of the whole group, was particularly acute when discussion turned towards the area of intersectionality, that is, overlapping protected characteristics. One experienced interviewee suggested that a potentially useful way to engage better with intersectionality within the religion and belief category, was a move away from engaging with religion and belief as homogenous entities with a "representative", to a more human rights based focus.

4.2.2.2.4.   Buy-in

A number of interviewees (50%) expressed considerable frustration at the amount of time and work they had invested on a particular project with people of religion and belief, to then find that a council decision has been made to discontinue the project before its completion.   One interviewee aptly encapsulated this sentiment:

> "You set out to have a plan of improvement, a three year plan, but you never quite achieve that. You maybe get a year and half down the line and the, the direction has changed for strategic or operational reasons or [sic], and then you're back to square one. And then all the time and effort that went into that, and you haven't, you haven't actually produced anything. And then that's something you get hit over the head over with, well, you said you were going to do this, that, and the other and you haven't achieved it…[pause]…and then you don't get the buy-in then from these people to engage with the next project."

4.2.2.2.5.   Knowledge of religion and belief

A majority of interviewees (87.5%) stated that they would like to have more support and knowledge when it comes to issues of religion and belief. For example, it was noted that the *Equality and Human Rights Commission* had published a document entitled *Guidance on the wearing of Sikh articles of faith in*

the workplace and public spaces (2010).[45] It was felt that having similar guidance for other religion and belief groups would be beneficial. It was also expressed by a majority of interviewees (87.5%) that having more general knowledge about various religion and belief groups would be beneficial to their individual job remit, as well as the wider council. For example:

> "I think there will be key things within each religion which each religion that, umm, not just the education authority but the authority in general should be aware of. So if there was, I guess for each religion a resource you could go to, whether it be a website, I guess a website is probably the easiest route to access the information with contact information where you could go to for more detailed advice, I mean that would be, because at the moment you're kinda just doing, just a bit of a, wild search on the web – who's the best to speak to about this."

> "We're not unique but we're slightly different because we don't have that the diverse population, people who are moving here tend to wish to just blend in. But where we are challenged, and it's going to happen more and more, we don't have the in-house knowledge or resources to go and explore it in detail. So it would be good to cover the key points and then, you know, a reference point to where we could go to get more information."

4.2.2.3.   Religion and belief perspectives on council provision

The focus groups provided a number of different perspectives on council provision for people of religion and belief. There were a number of positive examples put forward by participants of council provision for people of religion and belief. These examples include council flexibility to enable a care officer in a residential unit to attend Church when working on a Sunday rota, a genuine willingness to listen and respond to a particular religion group following a potential hate crime, willingness to lend out council venues and rooms for religion and belief events, and appropriate provision being made within schools to accommodate a different belief perspective. However, it must equally be acknowledged that such positive views were in the minority in relation to council provision for religion and belief.

A number of participants expressed a feeling that councils are happy to *be seen to be listening* to people of religion and belief, but then proceed with their own council agenda regardless of any feedback provided by people of religion and belief. As a sample of participants noted:

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[45] *Guidance on the wearing of Sikh articles of faith in the workplace and public spaces*, Equality and Human Rights Commission, December 2010.
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/publications/sikh_articles _of_faith_guidance_final.pdf

> "They [i.e., the council] make these plans and have to be seen to talk to us. But it makes no difference. I think, emm, they've already made the decision. They're just ticking some box somewhere."

> "Christianity is being undermined by aggressive secularism. The councils are part of this. They, they don't want to hear what we think. If we tell, they, they just ignore it and go ahead do what they want anyway."

> "The council is receptive but it's putting a lot of weight on community effort as well, it's not really putting its own weight in."

> "It feels like the council and government care more about non-minority religions than Christianity. They want to be seen with people of different skin colours and ethnic dress and, emm, you know, its all just an elaborate PR exercise for them. They don't actually care. They just want to be seen to be caring."

> "They don't listen to us seriously unless, you know, emm, you try to sue them for discrimination. Then they listen."

This focus on the receptivity of councils to listen, but not necessarily to respond, was particularly emphasized in relation to religion specific services – a topic mentioned by a number of participants. One participant, who was an experienced worker on behalf of minority religious communities in the area, aptly articulated this theme:

> "They [i.e., the councils] need to understand the need for faith specific services as opposed to faith sensitive services. A service can be faith sensitive and every service ought to be but some people, particularly when they are vulnerable and needing to be cared for, particularly seek out faith specific services because they want to be in their own environment, they want people around them who understand their own faith and culture. And the councils have been patchy in recognizing that. Sometimes it's dismissed as religion and as nothing to do with us and sometimes the councils will go out of their way to assist with provisions. So that's quite patchy."

> "There needs to be legally somewhere in the procurement processes, or in, emm, their [i.e., the council's] ability to provide services, there needs to be a get out for sometimes not using contracted services. It won't happen often, it really won't happen often, but there needs to be a mechanism that allows it to happen for small groups. And there'll be other

faiths like that, I'm sure, emm, so there needs to be some mechanism built in…so local authorities, they need to be person-centred and be able to negotiate on behalf of small handfuls of people."

For many belief participants, there was a frustration that even though they considered themselves to be the largest single group in Scotland[46], they are not invited to council consultations. Rather, religious groups, especially those that are long established, tend to be invited alongside other interfaith groups and associations. Sentiment on this was as follows:

"Non-religious people don't really have a say, we get ignored. We just get brushed along with whatever religious group is in power. Their involvement with government or state or whatever means we get brushed along and our views are never heard or asked for."

"I don't think we've been asked or approached to comment on anything by the council. The secular voice is non-existent."

"Secularist, and to a lesser extent humanism, but particularly secularism just, emm, just, just doesn't have access to forums."

A particular concern for a number of participants in the belief category was the presence of unelected religious officials on education committees. This has already been mentioned in the survey findings at the start of this chapter. Such an unelected religious presence on education committees was felt to be reflective of the privileging that religion enjoys and that, by contrast, other beliefs do not have.

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[46] This is on the basis of the 'no religion' category (37%) from the 2011 Census in Scotland. See *2011 Census: Key Results on Population, Ethnicity, Identity, Language, Religion, Health, Housing and Accommodation in Scotland - Release 2A*, A National Statistics publication for Scotland, p.3. http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/censusresults/release2a/StatsBulletin2A.pdf

4.3.   Section II – Focus on social attitudes

These research findings are drawn primarily from the online survey but will, where appropriate, be supplemented with the findings from focus groups. The research findings for this section will be split into four categories: responses to The Equality Act's (2010) definitions of religion and belief, social attitudes, understanding, and further relevant findings.

4.3.1. Responses to The Equality Act (2010) definitions on "religion" and "belief"

The Equality Act (2010) understands "religion" to refer to "any religion and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion."[47] It further understands "belief" to mean "any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief."[48] The questionnaire asked respondents their opinion on these definitions by way of three closed responses and the option for further elaboration in a comment box.

4.3.1.1.   The Equality Act (2010) definition of "religion"

The question concerning the definition on "religion" was as follows:

Q: The Equality Act (2010) defines religion as referring to "any religion and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion". Do you think this is a useful definition?

The responses were:

	Frequency (%)
Yes	625 (44.42%)
No	604 (42.93%)
Don't know	178 (12.65%)
Total	1407 (100%)

Table 8: Responses to Equality Act definition of "religion"

All respondents (100%) completed this question. Additionally, 339 (24%) respondents opted to elaborate on their answer in the comment box. A representative selection of comments that encapsulate a majority of responses are:

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[47] The Equality Act (2010), Part II, Chapter 1, 10.1, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/10
[48] The Equality Act (2010), Part II, Chapter 1, 10.2, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/10

> "Nonsensical to refer to 'a lack of religion' as a definition of religion"

> "I don't see how religion can refer to a lack of religious belief. I do not have any religious beliefs therefore I am not religious and do not practice a religion. If this refers to an individual's non-beliefs being protected as equal then I would agree with that."

In particular, 137 comment box respondents (40%) expressed frustration that their self-identification as having "no religion" was often expressed as a "lack of religion":

> "In my opinion, a lack of religion is a lack of religion. Being an atheist person, I feel disregarded and patronised when I am told by a legal document that my lack of religion is my religion."

> "This order of priority suggests lack of religion is deficit and religion is default - the power lies with religion and it should not if we are to be treated equally".

> "The phrase 'lack of religion' suggests a deficit perspective that promotes religion as the norm. I think that public policy and discourse should be making much more use of terms such as agnostic and atheist - which in my opinion reflect the majority of the population."

Such perspectives may be understood to support the 2011 Census results in which, arguably, the *single biggest group[49]* with which people identified was "no religion" at 36.7%.[50] Similar sentiments to this were often expressed in focus groups with people of belief.

4.3.1.2.   The Equality Act (2010) definition of "belief"

The response to the question on the definition of "belief" was:

Q: The Equality Act (2010) defines "belief" as referring to "any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief". Do you think this is a useful definition?

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[49] Arguably, the position could be put forward that Christianity was the largest single group with an identification of 53.8% of the population. However, it must be acknowledged that this figure represents an *amalgamation* of those who identified *separately* as 'Church of Scotland' (32.4%), 'Roman Catholic' (15.9%), and 'Other Christian' (5.5%). By contrast 36.7% of the population identified with single category of 'No religion'.
[50] *2011 Census: Key Results on Population, Ethnicity, Identity, Language, Religion, Health, Housing and Accommodation in Scotland - Release 2A*, A National Statistics publication for Scotland, p.32.

The responses were:

	Frequency (%)
Yes	701 (50.11%)
No	535 (38.24%)
Don't know	163 (11.65%)
Total	1399 (99.9%)

Table 9: Responses to Equality Act definition of "belief"

This question received a 99.9% completion rate. Of this 99.9%, 266 (19%) respondents opted to elaborate on their answer in the comment box. A majority of these comments, 114 (54%), paralleled what respondents had stated in relation to The Equality Act's (2010) definition of "religion." A representative selection of comments that encapsulate a majority of responses are:

> "I feel the same about this as about the definition of religion above."

> "Disbelief (a chosen option not to believe) is not the same as lack of belief (too lazy/thoughtless/inept) to consider the matter and make an informed choice."

> "Atheism is not a lack of religion nor is a it religion. It is a secular belief and should be titled as such or something similar. Not a negative!"

In contrast to comments on the definition of "religion", a sizable minority of respondents (20%) that commented further considered the definition problematic due to the opinion that all people have beliefs. For example:

> "In this case "lack of belief" is an almost impossible position since one finds that almost everyone has a belief system albeit they do not recognize it or acknowledge it."

> "As above, but in this case it seems evident that having "no belief" is in itself a belief."

> "A lack of belief implies no belief at all. The fact that one chooses not to believe in something implies they believe that fact. One must believe something therefor [sic] to hold an opinion is expressing a belief."

The Equality Act's (2010) definition of "religion" split opinion among the people of religion and belief that took this survey. In comparing the "yes" and "no" results, a small majority of 1.49% consider the definition more useful than not – with 44.42% in favour of its usefulness, and 42.93% not. A remaining 12.65% "didn't know." By contrast there was a higher margin of difference in relation to

The Equality Act's (2010) definition of "belief" among the people of religion and belief that took this survey. A majority of 11.87% considered it more useful than not while 11.65% "didn't know." For both definitions, people of belief expressed a frustration with either being understood as a "deficiency" (that is, a "lack" of something), or, and related to this, the presentation of the terms "religion" or "belief" as representing the "norm" from which others are defined. A minority of respondents noted, however, that the definition of "belief" seems all-encompassing.

4.3.2. Social attitudes

The survey sought to ascertain social attitudes from people of religion and belief. The social topics were decided upon through a six-month "media-watch" on discourses surrounding religion and belief in contemporary Scottish society. Respondents were asked "to what extent do you agree with the following statements?" in relation to fourteen contemporary social issues in religion and belief discourse. These fourteen statements were as follows:

1. A nurse should have the right to opt-out of a legal abortion on grounds of religion or belief.
2. A Muslim should have the right to pray at their place of work during working hours.
3. It is important to take account of a person's spiritual care in healthcare.
4. Euthanasia should be legalised.
5. People who assist terminally ill relatives commit suicide should be prosecuted.
6. Abortion is wrong in all circumstances.
7. Same-sex couples should have the right to adopt.
8. Non-religiously affiliated same-sex couples should be allowed to marry in a religious place of worship.
9. Religiously affiliated same-sex couples should be allowed to marry in a religious place of worship.
10. Religiously affiliated schools have a negative effect on contemporary Scottish Society.
11. All schools should have a distinctly secular ethos.
12. It is not possible to teach objectively about a particular religion or belief if one is not a member or adherent of that particular religion or belief position.
13. Religion is contrary to reason.
14. Religion and science are incompatible.

The response rate across the fourteen statements averaged at 99.5% with the lowest response rate for one statement at 99% (1,400 and 1,391 respondents respectively). A statistical analysis of the data set revealed highly significant differences in responses between people of religion and people of belief in relation to all 14 stated social issues except one. The statement, "it is not possible to teach objectively about a particular religion or belief if one is not a member or adherent of that particular religion or belief position," produced a

significant as opposed to a highly significant result.[51] These results suggest that attitudes towards various social issues between people of religion and belief are becoming polarized.[52]

4.3.3. Understanding

The online survey sought to ascertain the place of "understanding" in discourses surrounding religion and belief through the following three questions:

1. To what extent would you describe the wider community's understanding of your religion or belief?
2. To what extent do you think it is important for the wider community to have at least some understanding your religion or belief?
3. Would you like to improve the understanding of your religion or belief within your wider community?

Question one had a 100% response rate (1047 respondents). A majority of respondents (59.2%) rated the wider community's understanding of their religion or belief as "poor" or "none at all", while a minority (12.2%) rated the wider community's understanding of their religion or belief as "good" or "excellent".   Some 22.6% considered their wider community to have an "adequate" understanding of their religion or belief (Chart 4).
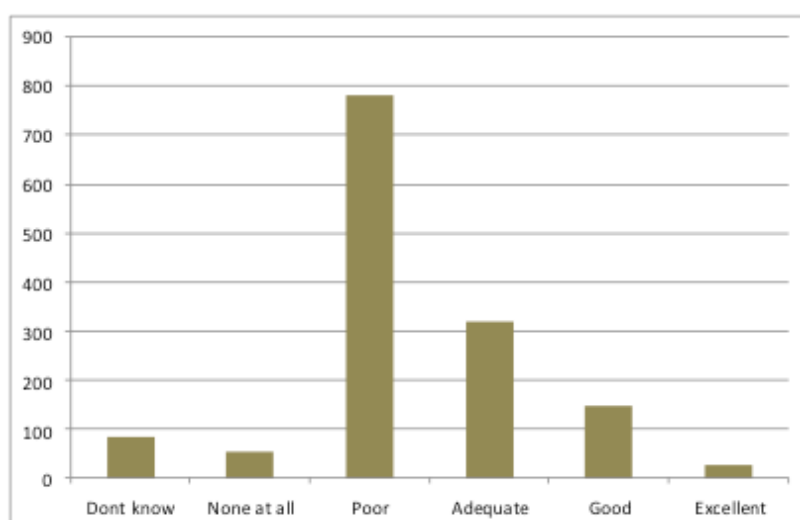

Chart 4: Responses to wider community's understanding of one's religion or belief

The survey result was echoed by a number of participants from different religion and belief backgrounds in the focus groups:

> "People just don't get the difference [between religions],
> emm, like, once, more than once in fact, I've been asked

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[51] Belief group versus non-belief group U = 230258.500, n1 = 733, n2 = 668, p = 0.044; religious group versus non-religious group U = 171560.500, n1 = 445, n2 = 956, p < 0.001).
[52] The project website www.faithandbeliefscotland.co.uk contains a breakdown of how various religion and belief groups responded to these questions.

about Ramadan or what halal is and I'm like, I'm a Sikh, not a Muslim!"

"People know absolutely nothing about Judaism. The level of ignorance is really quite shocking."

"I think a lot of religious people just can't conceive that there are people of no faith. They don't seem to understand that there is such a thing as total and utter non-belief… I cannot understand why people accuse me of having no morality or values just because I've spent my whole life as an atheist. Of course I can have moral values."

"When someone's holy book specifically mentions paganism as something that's wrong, then it's hard to prove to them otherwise. They just won't listen. I also think negative connotations associated with witches in popular culture doesn't help…[pause]…but I think the two are related."

"They [i.e., the secularists] seem to think religious schools are like terrorist cells indoctrinating people into thinking a certain way. The subjects are taught in the same way as any other school…[pause]…it's not like we're teaching creationism, we teach everything, including other world religions. I just don't get their issue. If you don't want to send your kid to a religious school, then don't. But there's a lot of people who do."

[In response to how well secularism is understood]
"Poorly, atrocious in fact…the reason that secularism isn't understood is, emm, all the acts point to religious education and religious observance which are dominated by the Church of Scotland and non-denominational schools, and eh, and the influence and quality of the teaching and educational materials and resources is appallingly poor."

Respondents were asked, "to what extent do you think it is important for the wider community to have at least some understanding your religion or belief?" This question received a 100% response rate (1407 respondents). A large majority of respondents (75.9%) stated that it was "important" or "very important" for the wider community to have at least some understanding of their religion or belief. A minority (9.6%) responded as "not at all important" or "not important", while 12.6% of respondents were "indifferent" (Chart 5).
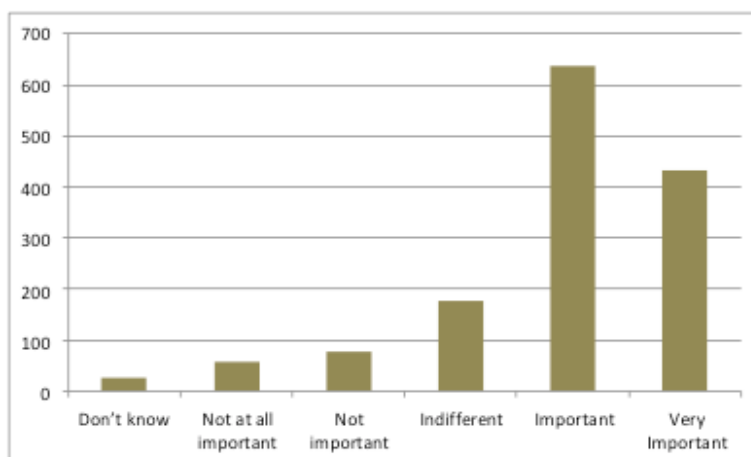
Chart 5: Responses to the importance of the wider community's understanding of one's religion or belief.

The responses from the survey suggest that a majority of people (59.2%) feel that the wider community's understanding of their religion or belief position is "poor" or "none at all" and a large majority (75.9%) think that it is important or very important for the wider community to have at least some knowledge of one's religion and belief position. Additionally, the survey revealed an appetite and willingness from both religion and belief groups to improve the understanding of their religion and belief group, and to learn about others. For example, a large majority of respondents (73.5%) from both religion and belief groups stated they would like to improve the understanding of their religion or belief within their wider community (Table 10). Similarly, a majority of people (52.5%) responded "yes" to the question "would you like to know more about different religion and belief groups?" (Table 11).

	Frequency (%)
Yes	1034 (73.5%)
No	90 (6.4%)
Indifferent	257 (18.3%)
Don't know	26 (1.8%)
Total	1407 (100%)

Table 10: Response to would you like to improve the understanding of your religion or belief within your wider community

	Frequency (%)
Yes	738 (52.5%)
No	262 (18.6%)
Indifferent	368 (26.2%)
Don't know	39 (2.8%)
Total	1407 (100%)

Table 11: Responses to would you like to know more about different religion and belief groups

These survey results suggest that while there is recognition of the need for better understanding of religion and belief groups – something supported by the majority perception that the present state of such understanding is poor or none existent – there is also a willingness to improve understanding and learn about other religion and belief groups.

4.3.4. Further relevant findings

The survey asked respondents, "which of these statements do you think best characterizes contemporary Scotland?" and offered five characterizations. The completion rate for this question was 100% (1407 people). A majority of people (53%) identified Scotland as a nation of many religions and beliefs but some are favoured more than others (Table 12).

	Frequency (%)
Nation of many religions and beliefs with each treated equally	100 (7.1%)
Post-Christian, secular nation	391 (27.8%)
Secular nation	66 (4.7%)
Nation of many religions and beliefs but some are favoured more than others	747 (53%)
Christian nation	103 (7.4%)
Total	1407 (100%)

Table 12: Responses to which of these statements do you think best characterizes contemporary Scotland?

A majority of respondents (57.6%) either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement that prayer can have a real effect on this world. By contrast, 32.2% of respondents either "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with this statement (Table 13). Similarly, a majority of respondents (65.8%) either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement that there are things in life that we simply cannot explain through science or any other means. By contrast, 25.3% of respondents either "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" with that statement (Table 14). Such sentiments are further detectable in the responses to one of the social attitude statements mentioned above, which asked respondents to what extent did they agree with the following statement, "it is important to take account of a person's spiritual care in healthcare." A strong majority of respondents (75%) either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement, while a minority (10.8%) "disagreed" or "strongly disagreed" (Table 15).

	Frequency (%)
Strongly agree	593 (42.1%)
Agree	218 (15.5%)
Unsure	115 (8.2%)
Disagree	98 (7%)
Strongly disagree	355 (25.2%)
Don't know	28 (2%)
Total	1407 (100%)

Table 13: Frequency of the extent respondents agree that prayer can have a real effect on this world

	Frequency (%)
Strongly agree	534 (38%)
Agree	391 (27.8%)
Unsure	105 (7.5%)
Disagree	170 (12%)
Strongly disagree	187 (13.3%)
Don't know	20 (1.4%)
Total	1407 (100%)

Table 14: Frequency of the extent respondents agree that there are things in life that we simply cannot explain through science or any other means

	Frequency (%)
Strongly agree	689 (49%)
Agree	390 (27.7%)
Unsure	164 (11.7%)
Disagree	77 (5.5%)
Strongly disagree	74 (5.3%)
Don't know	12 (0.8%)
Total	1406 (100%)[53]

Table 15: Responses of the extent to which people agree that it is important to take account of a person's spiritual care in healthcare

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[53] This question had a completion rate of 99.9% (1406/1407 respondents).

Chapter V   CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1.   Introduction

This research project found that council provision for people of religion and belief was "patchy" and that there is room for improvement in terms of specific provisions, policy assessment, and redressing the lack of specific knowledge and expertise to engage people of religion and belief effectively. It further found that equality has yet to be put at the heart of some council's working cultures. Focus groups with people of religion and belief reveal a general feeling that some councils do not listen to their opinion, or even consult them, and instead push on with their own agendas. The online survey revealed that while social attitudes of people of religion and belief are becoming polarized, there is also a majority desire to know more about other religion and belief perspectives.   It also revealed that 27% of respondents self-identified with religion *and* belief.

5.2.   Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings of this report, it is our considered opinion that a number of recommendations could be made and implemented to improve council provision for people of religion and belief. These recommendations can be separated into two categories, general recommendations, and council specific recommendations.

5.2.1.4.   General recommendations

5.2.1.1.   National advisory board

There was a clear sense that ecumenical and interfaith groups are well established and, as such, tend to be approached for consultation. By contrast, the belief category, in particular, is an emerging one and does not have the same opportunities for consultation. A majority of people of religion and belief felt that the understanding of their religion and belief position was poor among the wider community and often misrepresented in the media. A majority of people of religion and belief also expressed a desire to know more about other religion and belief positions. We therefore recommend the creation of a national advisory board for people of religion and belief to come together alongside government representatives to discuss areas of mutual national interest and concern. There is the potential for this national advisory board to have regional franchises to assist councils with their consultations. This may also contribute to improving knowledge and relations *between* religion and belief groups.

5.2.1.2.   Knowledge improvement

A majority of councils expressed a desire to have more expertise to draw upon when matters surrounding religion and belief arise. Related to that, there was clear desire to know more about religion and belief in general. In particular, attention was drawn to the document published by *Equality and Human Rights Commission* entitled *Guidance on the wearing of Sikh articles of faith in the*

workplace and public spaces (2010).[54] There was an agreement that having something comparable for other religion and belief groups would be beneficial for council workers. Indeed, more generally, this may also be a useful set of resources for employers. We recommend the creation of a website that councils, employers, teachers, and other interested parties could visit to the learn more about religion and belief. The envisioned website would contain:

1. Resources explaining more about the central tenets of various religion and belief groups. The people responsible for writing these resources should come from the various religion and belief groups.

2. Guidance on negotiating religion and belief in the workplace and in public spaces. This would combine generic guidelines with religion and belief-specific guidance.

3. A list of contact details for people of different religion and belief groups that can be consulted for further detailed discussions.

4. A list of appropriate contacts within councils that people of religion and belief can contact, should they wish to, about issues of religion and belief in their council jurisdictions.

5.2.1.3. Further research

This project had limited resources and a wide research remit. Its findings recommend further research into council provision for *individual* religion *and* belief groups throughout Scotland with a view to engaging with the often under-represented demographics of women, young people, and older people.[55] A project similar to this was recently carried out entitled *Being Jewish in Scotland.*[56] This project provided important insight into Jewish communities throughout Scotland. The main difference between that report and this recommendation would be a specific targeting of these under-represented demographics in relation to public sector duty and council service provisions. This would provide a more comprehensive mapping of religion and belief in contemporary Scotland.

5.2.1.4. Dialogue at the "religious-secular-humanist" interface

This report found that attitudes regarding the place of religion in society amongst people who identify with the "religion" category and those who identify with the "belief" category are becoming increasingly polarized. This runs the potential risk of a "new sectarianism" developing. There is a clear need for dialogue between members of these groups so that mutual understanding can be

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[54] *Guidance on the wearing of Sikh articles of faith in the workplace and public spaces*, Equality and Human Rights Commission, December 2010.
http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/documents/publications/sikh_articles _of_faith_guidance_final.pdf
[55] *Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities* (London: Home Office Faith Communities Unit) February 2004, paragraphs 2.2.31-2.2.34.
[56] *Being Jewish in Scotland*, August 2013, http://www.scojec.org/resources/files/bjis.pdf

built. The established interfaith groups may be well placed to facilitate such dialogues, and indeed have already done so to some extent, though more efforts in this area would be beneficial. Other organizations, such as the *Conforti Institute,* have also recently been engaged in such dialogue facilitation.[57]

5.2.2. Council specific recommendations

1. Equalities are something that is not yet at the heart of the practice of many councils. Instances were reported of the poor engagement that some councils have with equality agendas. The council workers that we interviewed all seemed to have a clear understanding of the importance of equalities and were committed to it. However, their wider working environment was sometimes grudging in its support for their work, including, at times, their superiors. This was something some interviewees found demoralizing. There was clear enthusiasm from most interviewees for equality training to be mandatory for both new *and* existing staff. This was considered a useful way to systematically embed equalities throughout council cultures. Such training would also include senior management to help ensure that an equality ethos enter into their policy formation.

2. The evaluation of the recent *Equalities Mainstreaming Report and Equality Outcomes* from all thirty-two councils revealed that a majority of councils (59%) appeared to only pay "lip-service" to the protected characteristic of religion and belief. Given the Public Sector Duty on councils, this needs to be redressed. The creation of a framework to assist councils in better assessing their work with religion and belief groups is strongly recommended. Some councils were doing an excellent job in this area and more effort should be made to share such best practice across councils. The implementation of this recommendation could help improve the quality of equality outcome assessments for the category of religion and belief.

3. Councils must ensure flexibility to meet the service demands of their increasingly diverse populations. A "one-size-fits-all" approach is no longer sufficient. This was particularly evident in the area of provision of religious food requirements. It is increasingly routine for alternative food provision to be made with regards to a number of special diets with vegetarian, diabetic, and gluten free being some of the most common. It is recommended that the same mechanisms that enable such provision be expanded to include religious food requirements such as halal, kosher, no garlic/onion, etc. Having such options listed alongside the presently existing dietary requirements of gluten free, vegetarianism, etc., would represent an important cultural shift. It would assist in religious food requirements not being understood as "exceptions" to the "norm", but rather one among a range of standard alternative dietary options for which provision is already made.

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[57] http://www.confortiinstitute.org

4. Continuing on the theme of flexibility within council service provision, the viability of councils to have appropriate "get out" clauses from their primary contracted service providers should be investigated. This would help enable councils to provide for those who may prefer a religion specific service as opposed to non-religion specific services.

5. It is equally acknowledged there are practical limits to the extent councils can provide flexibility in their service provision. These recommendations do not expect every preferential choice to be accommodated. Rather, this reports makes the case that mechanisms to source appropriate food from outside contractors be part of the standard working practice for councils. In addition, mechanisms should be in place for alternative religion specific services to be available should they be requested. Appropriate sources for both could be negotiated with the particular religious community to ensure their suitability.

6. Councils need to do more to include people from the belief category in their consultations and in general civic life. At present, there is a clear feeling among humanists and secularists that they do not receive the same level of invitation to official consultations as people of religion. Councils should do more to redress this in consultation with the *Humanist Society Scotland*, *Edinburgh Secular Society* (which is affiliated to the *National Secular Society*), and the *Scottish Secular Society*.

7. Patterns of consultation with religion and belief groups should be kept under continuous review to ascertain best practice within particular council areas, and also to ensure an appropriate level of proportionality in the consultative process in engaging with people of different religion and belief perspectives.

8. Councils should give due consideration, in terms of commitment of finances, resources, and time, to the viability of projects. This study noted that "buy-in" from people of religion and belief was often lost due to changing council priorities. It was noted that the loss of "buy-in" often lead to criticisms of the council, criticisms of the council worker involved in acting as liaison with people of religion and belief, and cynicism in taking part in future initiatives. To maintain "buy-in", resources should, if possible, be "ring-fenced" to support the life span of a project from conception to completion.

In seeking to enable the performance of the public sector equality duty, Scottish Ministers aimed to have, at the heart of their improvement agenda, "a focus on eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations".[58] On the basis of this study, the implementation of the above

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[58] *Scottish Ministers' proposals to enable the better performance of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2013-2017*, Scottish Government, December 2013, p.23.

recommendations would contribute positively to this on-going improvement agenda.

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Please contact the authors for the additional copies of this report. Alternatively, it can also be downloaded from www.faithandbeliefscotland.co.uk