

*Foreword*

*Phil Moses - BT's champion on Belief*

# Respect

for one another and valuing each others individuality are key to BT's culture and create an environment which is positive and supportive, enabling people to perform to the best of their ability.

By understanding something of the religions of our people, and our customers, we can be sure that we respond in a positive, supporting and respectful way towards others. For me, the critical thing is for everyone to take a flexible approach, to enable a good balance to be struck between the needs of the individual and the needs of the company.

I hope you will find this booklet a stimulating and interesting read, and will make use of the links to further information which are provided throughout the booklet.

## Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. What is a 'religion or belief'?	2
3. What does the law say?	2
4. What are the different religions	3
5. When are the main religious festivals?	11
6. Religion at work in BT	11
7. Q & As on religion in BT	14

### 1. Introduction

It is important that every one of us has the opportunity to reach our full potential and contribute fully to our business. Not only is it right for all our people, it also makes sense for BT. Tackling discrimination helps us to attract, motivate and retain the right people. It enhances our reputation both as an employer and as a business – with our customers, our suppliers and the communities within which we operate. Reflecting our diverse customer base enables us to better understand and meet the needs of our customers. There are no benefits to be achieved through discrimination.

In the UK, the law has for some time provided protection for people against discrimination on the grounds of gender, race or disability. For me, the critical thing is for everyone to take a flexible approach, to enable a good balance to be struck between the needs of the individual and the needs of the company. This booklet has been put together to help our people understand what this means for them and what they can expect from BT.

It is important to remember that valuing diversity is about acknowledging what we have in common as much as about our differences. The booklet provides some initial guidance on the background to, and customs of a range of different religions, and will also help us understand and respond to the potential impact in the workplace. Increasing our knowledge of others' religions and beliefs will help recognise these similarities as much as the differences, and help us to both value and respect them.

While the new regulations apply specifically to Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) with separate legislation applying in Northern Ireland, they largely reflect a European Directive. In addition, it is BT Group wide policy that we do not discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief, or on other grounds. These principles are therefore applicable company wide

## 2. What is a 'religion or belief'?

'Religion or belief' is defined in the regulations simply as meaning 'any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief'. Although many people will know of a number of the more established or visible religions, ultimately it will be for an employment tribunal to decide whether a particular claim to a religion is accepted. This booklet covers a number of the religions likely to be practised by our people, but it is not intended to be exhaustive. If a person seeks to invoke rights under the legislation for a religion which is not easily recognised, further advice should be sought on the approach to take.

With the growth in alternative lifestyles, it is important to remember that all faiths may be practised by people from differing backgrounds and traditions and with varying degrees of adherence. For example, not all the Muslims you meet will say prayers five times a day, just as not all Christians go to church every Sunday. However, even people who do not strictly adhere to all of the practices of their religion can be affected by the beliefs, rituals and history of the faith they were born into or later adopt. Equally, it is important to recognise and respect those people who have no religious belief.

## 3. What does the law say?

The law says that employers, and their employees, cannot discriminate against people on the grounds of religion or belief. As with the laws on other kinds of discrimination, there are different ways in which discrimination could occur:

**Direct Discrimination** – people must not be treated less favourably than others because they follow, or do not follow a particular (or any) religion or belief or there is a perception to that effect. For example it is unlawful to decide not to employ someone, refuse them promotion or training, or dismiss them for reasons related to their religion/belief and the practices which go with that.

**Indirect Discrimination** – selection criteria, policies, employment rules or any other practices must not have the effect of disadvantaging people of a particular religion or belief which cannot be sufficiently justified. Like direct discrimination, indirect discrimination is unlawful whether it is intentional or not. An example of this may be enforcing a dress code which does not allow people to meet specific dress requirements of their religion/belief - e.g. Sikh men wearing a turban or Muslim women wearing a Hijab, unless there is an objective justification for that requirement, which cannot be overcome through a flexible approach to workplace practices.

**Harassment** – occurs where, on grounds of religion or belief, someone does something which has the purpose or effect of violating another's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for the other person. This could include; related nicknames, teasing, or other behaviour which may not be intended to be malicious but nevertheless are upsetting. It may be about the individual's own religion or belief or it may be about the religion or belief of those with whom the individual associates.

**Victimisation** – this is where an individual is treated detrimentally because they have made a complaint about discrimination or harassment or have given evidence relating to a complaint about discrimination or harassment.

It is everyone's personal responsibility not only to act towards others in a way which is not discriminatory, but also to refuse to accept it in others and to challenge any unacceptable behaviour.

## 4. What are the different religions?

The following information has been taken from ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service) Guidance on Religion or Belief in the Workplace, and the BBC world religions website, and represents some of the most commonly practised religions and beliefs in Britain, based on information from the latest census. This can only be an overview, and details on all aspects of different beliefs is currently not available, for example bereavement. Often the best way to learn about what people believe, what their festivals are, and how and when they observe their religion etc is from discussion with them.

More detailed information can also be found on the BBC world religions website,

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion>

These religions are presented in alphabetical order.

# Buddhism

Buddhism was founded 2,500 years ago in North East India (Nepal) by Prince Siddhartha Gautama who, after having undergone a spiritual experience now known as Enlightenment, was thereafter known as Buddha, which means 'the awakened one'. There are estimated to be 300 million Buddhists worldwide, the majority in South East Asia and the Far East. Within the UK there are around 100,000 and this number is growing. Nearly every Buddhist tradition is represented in the UK, with approximately 17 monastic centres and 18 meditation centres between them.

**Key Beliefs** Buddhists do not believe in a creator God, nor do they worship gods. Instead, the Buddha taught that a natural law of moral causation exists in the universe and that transgression of this natural law brings with it certain adverse consequences. The essence of Buddhist belief is the doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, which were revealed to the Buddha during his meditations:

- Suffering and imperfection are part of life (dukha);
- They are caused by selfishness and desire (samodaya);
- Release from suffering is possible (nirodha);
- It can be achieved only by following the 'Eightfold Path' which makes it possible to reach the state of bliss and freedom known as Nirvana (magga).

**Festivals** There are a number of different sects of Buddhism arising from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Different sects will celebrate different festivals. Some Buddhist traditions do not celebrate any festivals. Buddhist members of staff should be asked which festivals are important to them. Festivals follow the lunar calendar and will therefore not take place on the same day each year.

**Food** Most Buddhists are vegetarian reflecting their adherence to the precept of non-harm to self and others. Many would not want to prepare or serve meat for others.

**Clothing** As above – most Buddhists would prefer to wear clothing which reflects their adherence to non-harm

# Christianity

Christianity was founded about 2,000 years ago and is based on the teachings of Jesus, known as Christ or Messiah, meaning 'the anointed one'. There are estimated to be 1.2 billion Christians worldwide. It is also the largest religion in Britain, with around 30 million people regarding themselves as nominally Christian, although only about 6 million of these are actively committed to the faith. Many different forms of Christianity are practised in the UK, for example, Catholicism, Church of England, 7 day Adventists, Baptists etc.

**Key beliefs and Holy Writings** Christians are people who believe that Jesus Christ, who lived in the Holy Land 2,000 years ago, is the Son of God, and who follow his teachings and those of the Christian churches that grew up after his death. Christians believe that there is only one God, but this one God is a trinity of three persons in one. The Christian holy book is the Old and New Testament of the Bible.

**Places of Worship** There are a wide variety of Christian churches and organisations. Many practicing Christians will wish to attend their Church on Sundays throughout the year, and may request a late start on a number of 'holy days of obligation' throughout the year.

**Festivals**

- Ash Wednesday – Feb/March this is a day of fasting/ abstinence for many christians
- Maundy Thursday – 3 days before Easter which is in March/April
- Good Friday – 2 days before Easter
- Easter Sunday – March/April
- All Saints Day – 1st November
- Christmas Eve – 24th December
- Christmas Day – 25th December

**Food** Some Christian churches avoid alcohol.

**Clothing** Some Christian churches forbid the use of cosmetics and require their female members to dress modestly.

**Bereavement** No special requirements beyond normal compassionate leave.

# Hinduism

Hinduism is the name of the religion of the majority of people living in India; the name derives from a word meaning “India”. It is an ancient religion, a wide variety of practices and beliefs. The following indicates some of its more common features. Worldwide there are estimated to be around 500 million Hindus, the majority in India. Hindus in Britain number about 400,000 with sizeable Hindu communities in London and Leicester.

**Key Beliefs** Hinduism is a religion personified by many gods, who are themselves regarded as manifestations of different attributes of one supreme God. The three main gods are Brahma, creator of the world, Vishnu, preserver of the world and Shiva, the destroyer. Vishnu is often worshipped in the form of his incarnations, Krishna and Rama. At the heart of Hindu philosophy lie the concepts of:

- Reincarnation;
- Karma, or past action, and the belief that right living and good deeds in one life lead to reincarnation in a higher form or salvation; and
- Dharma or duty, appropriate to an individual’s status and caste in the present life

**Places of Worship** Hindu temples are usually places where the priests serve the gods on behalf of the people. Only at festival times do they become the focal point of congregational worship. Daily worship is offered in the home, although more emphasis is placed on regular congregational worship in the temple. Before entering the temple the hands are washed and shoes removed. The central ceremony includes lighting the sacred fire using ghee (clarified butter) as well as prayers and the singing of hymns. The river Ganges in India has a particular significance for Hindus; it is a holy river and Hindus who bathe in it believe they are purified.

**Festivals** Hinduism is a diverse religion and not all Hindus will celebrate the same festivals. Diwali and the New Year (late Oct/early Nov) are key times.

**Clothing** Hindu women will often wear a bindi which is a red spot worn on the forehead and denotes that she is of the Hindu faith. In addition, many married Hindu women wear a necklace (mangal sutra) which is placed around their necks during the marriage ceremony and is in addition to a wedding ring.

A few Orthodox Hindu men wear a small tuft of hair (shikha) similar to a ponytail but this is often hidden beneath the remaining hair. Some Orthodox Hindu men also wear a clay marking on their foreheads known as a tilak.

**Food** Most Hindus are vegetarian and will not eat meat, fish or eggs.

**Bereavement** Following cremation, close relatives of the deceased will observe a 13 day mourning period during which they will wish to remain at home. The closest male relatives may take the ashes of the deceased to the Ganges, in India. They may therefore request extended leave. Close male relatives of the deceased may shave their heads as a mark of respect.

# Islam

Islam was founded about 1,400 years ago by the Prophet Muhammad; people who follow this faith are known as Muslims. Muslims number about 1 billion worldwide, with an estimated 2 million living in Britain. Most Muslims in Britain originate from the Indian subcontinent - India, Pakistan and Bangladesh - as well as from East Africa, the Middle East and North Africa.

**Key Beliefs** Muslims believe in one God whose name in Arabic is 'Allah'. They also honour a succession of prophets from Abraham and Moses, through Jesus to Muhammad in the 7th century, but do not regard Jesus as divine.

Muslims are required to follow the 'Five Pillars of Islam':

- Affirmation that there is no other God but Allah (Shahada);
- Five daily ritual prayers, at dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and night (Salah);
- Fasting during the month of Ramazan (often written as Ramadan). To keep strictly to the fast, Muslims will abstain from food and drink from dawn until sunset (Sawm);
- Giving money to the poor (Zakah); and making a pilgrimage to Islam's most holy shrine, the place of the Prophet Muhammad's birth at Mecca, at least once in a lifetime (Hajj).

Any form of gambling is forbidden, and physical contact between the sexes is discouraged, and some Muslims may politely refuse to shake hands with the opposite sex.

**Holy Writings** The holy book of Muslims is known as the Qur'an, which contains the revelations given by God to Muhammad.

**Places of Worship** Muslims worship in mosques, which are social centres and centres of learning, as well as places of worship. The Imam is the religious leader.

**Prayers** Observant Muslims are required to pray five times a day. Each prayer time takes about 10 minutes and can take place anywhere clean and quiet. Prayer times are:

- At dawn (Fajr)
- At mid-day (Zuhr) in Winter sometime between 1200-1300hrs and in Summer between 1300 - 1600hrs.
- Late Afternoon (Asr) in Winter 1430-1530
- After Sunset (Maghrib)
- Late Evening (Isha)

Friday mid-day prayers are particularly important to Muslims and may take a little longer than other prayer times. Friday prayers must be said in congregation and may require Muslims to travel to the nearest mosque or prayer gathering. Before prayers, observant Muslims undertake a ritual act of purification. This involves the use of running water to wash hands, face, mouth, nose, arms up to the elbows and feet up to the ankles, although often the washing of the feet will be performed symbolically.

There may be prayer at additional times too, for example, before an important event or meeting.

**Food** Muslims are forbidden to eat any food which comes from the pig, including lard which may be present in bread, or in ice cream. Meat that may be consumed must be slaughtered by the Halal method. Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol, including in food dishes.

**Festivals** Ramadan takes place in the 9th month of the Muslim lunar calendar. Eid Al-Fitr is 3 days to mark the end of Ramadan, and many Muslims may seek leave for the first of the three days. Eid Al-Adha takes place 2 months and 10 days after Eid Al-Fitr and is again a 3 day festival when many Muslims will seek leave for the first day.

# Jainism

There are thought to be between 25 – 30,000 Jains in Britain. Estimates vary although the community is probably growing. No statistics are officially collected but community sources say that the most popular areas for the Jain community are North West London, Leicester and Coventry. In the UK there are four Jain places of worship of which three are in the Greater London area and one in Leicester.

**Key Beliefs and Holy Writings** Jain scriptures are known as the Shruta, Agamas or the Holy Siddhanta (doctrine) which comprise canonical literature containing the teachings of Mahavira and other Tirthankaras.

Jains are required to worship three times daily, before dawn, at sunset and at night. Jains working evening or night shifts may wish to take time out to worship or take their meals before sunset.

**Festivals** Include Oli, which involves – 8 days semi fasting twice a year (April and Oct) Diwali – includes a 2 day fast (Oct/Nov), Paryusan – 8 days of fasting, observance of religious rituals, meditation (Aug/Sept).

**Food** Jains practice avoidance of harm to all life – self and others. They are, therefore, strict vegetarians, including the avoidance of eggs. Some may take milk products. Many also avoid root vegetables. Jains do not eat between sunset and sunrise. Jains do not drink alcohol.

**Bereavement** Cremation will take place as soon as practical after death (usually 3 – 5 days). There is no specified mourning period and there are not usually special requirements beyond normal compassionate leave.



# Judaism

Judaism was founded about 4,000 years ago by Abraham, who taught his people to worship one God - Jehovah or Yahweh. There are approximately 15 million Jewish people worldwide, and around 300,000 in the UK where the largest communities are in Greater London, Manchester and Leeds.

- Key Beliefs and Holy Writings** Jews believe in one God and assert this daily in their prayers. The Old Testament of the Bible contains the sacred Jewish writings. The first five books comprise the Torah and reveal the will of God. They are central to the Jewish faith. Observant Jews usually refrain from work on the Sabbath and Festivals, except where life is at risk. This includes travelling (except on foot), writing, carrying, switching on and off electricity, using a telephone and is buying and selling. The Sabbath and all other Festivals begin one hour before dusk and so practising Jews need to be home by then. Sabbath begins one hour before dusk on Friday.
- Places of Worship** The Jewish centre of worship is the synagogue; the Hebrew word means 'to gather together'. It is the focal point of Jewish activity, being the place for prayer, meeting others and a centre of administration. The Rabbi is a teacher to the community.
- Festival** Passover – 2 sets of 2 days ( March/April), Pentecost – 2 days (May/June), New Year – 2 days (Sept/Oct), Day of Atonement – 1 day fasting (Sept/Oct), Tabernacles – 2 sets of 2 days (Sept/Oct).
- Clothing** Orthodox Jewish men keep their head covered at all times. Orthodox Jewish women will wish to dress modestly and may not want to wear trousers, short skirts or short sleeves; some may wish to keep their heads covered by a scarf or beret.
- Food** Jews are required to eat only kosher food (which has been treated and prepared in a particular manner). In addition certain foods are completely prohibited – e.g. animal products from Pigs, Shellfish, etc. Also, during the festival of Passover, food restrictions are greater, and Jews may not eat any substance containing leaven (raising agents).
- Bereavement** Funerals must take place as soon as possible following the death – the same day where possible – and therefore take place at short notice. Following a death, the immediate family must stay at home and mourn for 7 days (Shiva). Following the death of a Father or Mother, an observant Jewish man will be required to go to a Synagogue to pray morning, afternoon and evening for 11 months of the Jewish calendar.

# Rastafarianism

Rastafarianism dates back to the early 1930s when the Prince Regent, Ras ('Prince') Tafari, was crowned as Emperor Haile Selassie 1 of Ethiopia (1930 – 74). It is from Ras Tafari that this Revivalist Movement gained its name. Rastafarians believe in one God (Jah) and that they and all Africans who have migrated are but exiles in 'Babylon'. They are destined to be delivered out of captivity by a return to Zion or Africa – the land of their ancestors. There are believed to be about 250,000 adherents to this religion world-wide, of whom approximately 5,000 live in the United Kingdom.

**Key Beliefs** The Bible is the main religious text of Rastafarianism. The African race is one of God's chosen races, one of the twelve Tribes of Israel. Jamaica is the biblical 'Babylon', although all the places to which Africans have been exiled are also included. 'Babylon' is the place which will never see spiritual reform and liberation. 'Jah' is believed to reside in each person and there is 'Oneness' between the individual and God. Revivalism, the belief that they are destined to be delivered out of captivity by a return to Zion or Africa, is the key tenet of faith held by the adherents to Rastafarianism.

**Festivals** Birthday of Haile Selassie 1 (July 23), Ethiopian New Year (Sept 11), Anniversary of the crowning of Haile Selassie (Nov 2), Christmas.

**Food** Vegetarian including the avoidance of eggs. Many Rastafarians eat only organic food as close to its raw state as possible.

**Clothing** Hair is worn uncut and plaited into 'dreadlocks'. It is often covered by a hat which is usually red, green and gold.

**Bereavement** No specific requirements beyond that of normal compassionate leave.

# Sikhism

The Sikh religion was founded in Northern India in the fifteenth century by Guru Nanak. It was originally conceived as a synthesis between Hinduism and Islam, but rapidly took its own distinctive identity. There are estimated to be about 20 million Sikhs throughout the world, with around 500,000 in Britain. The Sikh community in Southall, London, represents the largest concentration of Sikhs outside the Indian sub-continent.

**Key Beliefs** Sikhs believe in one God, whose word was revealed to mankind through ten major prophets called 'Gurus'. Salvation comes from achieving union with God through devotional worship. Until that union is achieved, Sikhs believe they must live through many reincarnations. One of the fundamental beliefs to Sikhs is fairness and equality for everyone.

**Holy Writings** The holy texts are known as the Guru Granth Sahib and consist of a collection of hymns and prayers of the Gurus. They include texts from followers of other faiths such as Islam and Hinduism.

**Holy Places** The Sikh temple is known as a Gurdwara and is the focus for public worship. Temples range in size from the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the focal point of the Sikh religion, to converted houses in urban Britain. Regardless of the size of the building, there is always a central place for the Guru Granth Sahib. Before entering the temple the hands should be washed, shoes removed and head covered.

**Sikh Names** Sikh men commonly adopt the name Singh, meaning 'lion' and women the name Kaur, 'princess'. These names symbolise the unity and equality between men and women which are key concepts of Sikh philosophy.

**Festivals** Include various days throughout the year relating to the birth or martyrdom of different Gurus. Also Vaisakhi, the main Sikh Festival (April) and Divali (Oct/Nov). Festival days are currently set by the lunar calendar. However, in the near future this will be changed to regularised annual dates.

**Food** Some do not eat beef and many are vegetarian. Sikhism specifically prohibits smoking as it is considered that smoking causes impurities to enter the body.

**Clothes** Practicing Sikhs will wish to observe the 5 Ks of the faith. That is:

- Kesh – Beard, uncut hair and turban
- Kangha – Small comb worn in the hair beneath the turban
- Kara – Metal bracelet worn on the right wrist
- Kachhahera – Knee length underpants
- Kirpan – Small ceremonial sword worn under the shirt and which should remain hidden.

## 5. When are the main religious festivals?

For many religions, one or more of the festival days will occur on different dates in different years, often depending on the lunar calendar. Although personal calendars will often list many religious festival dates over a number of years, in some cases this can be subject to late confirmation.

Regularly updated information on a wide range of religious festivals is available via the Shap Calendar of religious festivals and publications calendar , which can be found on the belief HR site.

## 6. Religion at work in BT.

In BT, we should all be proud of our diverse workforce, and of the many examples of individuals, teams and businesses working together to understand, celebrate and enable each other's religious practices. Here are just a few examples of how religion impacts on our people in BT, and how BT is already respecting and accommodating people's requirements:

**Naaman Sabir, Sales Manager,**  
*Glasgow CCC, BT Retail*

"The month of Ramadan is very important for myself. In this month practising my religion is held in very high regard. Each good deed or practice of religion is multiplied 70 fold. So the importance on my agenda is extremely high. This is coupled with the fact that we are fasting as well and missing a fasting day without a reasonable reason would mean that I would have to fast another 30 days.

Taking into account the above factors the senior management team in Glasgow has each year responded very positively. They have accommodated all requests and appointed myself and another colleague to overlook all requests to ensure everyone is treated fairly and that the Muslim religion is able to be practised by all that wish to do so.

To be very honest I am delighted with the response of my colleagues at all levels in the interest they have shown in my religion and their helpfulness in ensuring that all can practice the religion. Last year in Glasgow we had a large number of people who wished to practice Islam within the call centre and wished to take a day off at the end of the fasting period. I personally thought this would be difficult to accommodate. Despite this everyone who wished to have the day off to celebrate the end of the fasting month received the day off. The senior management team found solutions to address the resourcing shortfall through overtime etc to ensure everyone was accommodated".

**Jenny Arwas, Director BT Group Operations HR**  
*BT Centre, London*

"My religion is very important to me, and throughout my career in BT, my line managers and colleagues have always been interested and supportive about my religious needs.

There are many Jewish festivals during the year and some require a huge amount of entertaining. For example, 2 to 3 days over New Year, and Passover which requires a complete change of the food I normally eat. During Passover, I can only eat unleavened bread, and products with no raising agents. However I am able to work around these requirements, and I am usually able to specify dietary requirement ahead of site visits and when attending conferences during the festival period. BT has been very accommodating on these occasions, although no one has yet come up with a great kosher alternative to bacon butties for breakfast!

Another important festival is the Day of Atonement in the Autumn, where a day is set aside for people to demonstrate repentance and make amends for their sins of the past year. No work can be performed on that day, and there is a complete fast beginning at sunset on the evening before, and ending after nightfall on the Day of Atonement. Again BT has been very flexible where alternative arrangements need to be made on occasions where I need to be home before fasting begins"

### **Farzana Zahir**

*BT Wholesale Technical Officer*

"I am a practising Muslim and my religion is Islam. The key religious activities that I participate in are The Month of Ramazan, Eid-ul-fitr and Eid-ul Adha, As well as performing the daily obligatory prayers and pilgrimage to Makkah.

I don't think that my religion affects my working environment in BT, although I believe it is vital that all members of staff respect each other's religion or their beliefs. A little consideration from each other makes a big difference in our working and personal lives. It is my duty to make my colleagues aware. For example I wear Hijab, and I am happy to explain to my work colleagues the reasons for doing so.

Religious tolerance is important in gaining greater understanding of religion /beliefs. I believe that BT should encourage keeping every one's individuality, and it is BT's policy that we do not discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief.

One area that I would like to raise awareness is that Muslims are not allowed to drink alcohol, or eat food that is not Halal. It is worth bearing this in mind for team building events, or BT recognition events, social events The 'norm' tends to be very much 'Lets go for a pint'. I think this needs to change, especially if there are people who can't have alcohol.

### **Deb Sheahan**

*Senior Billing Manager CCC Leicester*

We have got several backgrounds on the site – a mix of agency and BT. Sixty-seven percent of the agency work force are actually of an ethnic background. We often have to make adjustments to working hours, taking into consideration people's different feast days - lots of the feast days means that people have to fast at certain times so we have to change people shift patterns and be very sympathetic towards it whilst balancing obviously the needs of the customer. I don't think we have ever had to turn somebody down. We have changed their shift pattern or changed their day off, we have moved their lunch hour. It is not just feast days, it is things like funerals and weddings. A lot of the religions require substantially more input from individuals within the family than perhaps we have always been used to. People will regularly swap with one another – it is not just the management team changing attendances. People within the team help by swapping because they respect that people will have to do different things, and they know then that they can ask another time if something comes up for them.

We have always had tolerance within the teams. People tend to take this as business as usual now, it is not something that we feel we are doing especially, it is something that we have always done. You will hear the people within the team asking one another what does that mean, why do you have to do that so everyone's awareness of the different religions is increasing.

We did come across some difficulties, practical difficulties. Sometimes for particular feast days people need to pray at certain times of the day so to accommodate that we clear a room when it is coming up to that time.

Because we are in a Contact Centre it is really keen that we keep motivation within the teams and to keep the momentum going and to keep the team spirit. We have introduced lots of theme days. We have had beach days, we have had two different world days where everybody dressed up in costumes and everybody joined in."

### **Nog Wilde**

*Wideband Optic Fibre Technician, BT Wholesale*

"I am a Roman Catholic. The major Religious activities events that I actively get involved in are Christmas, Easter, Sunday Mass and Holy days of obligation

My faith has very little impact on my work with BT, however I do think that BT should encourage greater awareness around religion. We work and trade in a multi-faith society".

**Nadeem Mian,**

*BT Global Service, Commercial Manager*

Ramadan, the Muslim fasting month began on Monday 27th October. As there are many Muslims in Croydon, it was apparent that there would be a need for a prayer room. This room would not only enable Muslims to pray, but will also allow them to break their fast with food donated by other fellow Muslims. I decided to contact the Building facilities team to see if they could accommodate our need for a prayer room. Monteray were very helpful and understood our need and were able to arrange a room (for the month of Ramadan) which would be allocated just for prayers.

This room was well used by Muslims, which allowed prayers to be conducted easily and quickly, as the individuals no longer need to search for a spare room.

**Pat Willis**

*HR Manager – BT Northern Ireland*

In Northern Ireland, legislation which covers Religion and Political belief was introduced back in 1989. The 'Fair Employment' legislation reflects the Government's determination to ensure equality of opportunity in employment for both Protestants and Roman Catholics in Northern Ireland.

As part of our commitment to ensuring equality of opportunity for both sides of the community, we promote a good and harmonious working environment and atmosphere in which no-one feels under threat or intimidated because of their Religious belief or Political opinion. This means that the display of flags, emblems, posters or graffiti which are likely to give offence to, or cause apprehension among, existing or potential employees is prohibited. The wearing of all football shirts is also prohibited, as is the wearing of any badges that are likely to cause offence. This is accepted by people in Northern Ireland and seen as a positive step in ensuring the fair treatment at work of a diverse workforce.

Recognising and encouraging religious diversity, as with diversity in all its forms, is not only good for our people, it also presents us with huge business opportunities worldwide:

**Danny Garvey**

*Vice President Marketing BT Global Services*

"Diversity is key to our business proposition. Helping our customers meet the diverse requirements of their organisations and those of their customers is what putting ICT to work is all about. Religious diversity brings this point to life perfectly. Let me give you two examples. ICT makes team working around the world, with team members observing different holidays and weekend rest days, an asset not a problem. When one part of the team is off the others are working. We help our global customers take advantage of such opportunities as ICT enables team members to work seamlessly in this way.

My second example concerns travel. Many of the world's major religions encourage vast numbers of people to travel to holy places or to particular locations to celebrate key events. This presents enormous opportunities for our customers in the travel and financial services industries. These opportunities are critically dependent not only on global excellence in ICT but on understanding the cultural and religious needs of the reason for such travel. Such understanding only comes from a truly diverse team such as BTs.

These are just two specific examples. It is the combination of technology and people skills that give us the winning edge in all we do".

## 7. Q & As on religion in BT

**Q. Do these regulations apply to all BT people, worldwide?**

**A.** While the new regulations are specific to Britain, they largely reflect a European Directive. In addition, it is BT Group wide policy that we do not discriminate on the grounds of religion or belief, or on other grounds. The principles are therefore applicable company wide. In some countries, additional local policies will apply.

**Q. I am required to wear corporate clothing and my religion requires me to wear a particular type of clothing, what options do I have?**

**A.** BT's corporate clothing supplier will aim to meet specific requests for religious clothing. If the product is not in stock, the order time may be slightly longer than the standard 3 working day lead-time. Typical examples include Saris, Kamee's etc. For further information, please see the Corporate Clothing website at <http://businessservices.intra.bt.com:80/SCSP/corporate/clothing/>

**Q. I sometimes need to visit members of my team at their home (homeworkers, people on sick leave etc), is this likely to be a problem?**

**A.** You will need to be aware of any implications for that individual's religion or belief; for example it may not be acceptable for a male to visit an unaccompanied female, or you may need to be flexible around the timing of your visit. It is usually best to talk directly to the individual and find out if any particular arrangements need to be made, and agree between you how the visit will be conducted.

**Q. I am organising an event for a diverse team, how could religion impact on arrangements?**

**A.** BT's approach to our people and their needs should equally apply during organised events and every attempt made to provide an environment which is supportive of people's religious needs. For example you should take into account the range of dietary needs, the timing of the event (ideally not Friday afternoons) and the availability of breaks suitable for prayer. You should also determine whether any special arrangements are necessary e.g. during periods of fasting. Care should also be taken with less formal team activities – for example an individual may feel intimidated or excluded if team meetings or events regularly lead to a pub visit, so a flexible approach to work related social activities should be considered.

**Q. I have had a request for time off for prayers, what should I do?**

**A.** Managers should give reasonable consideration to requests for time off for prayer, and wherever possible allow the individual flexibility to accommodate their religious requirements. This should not result in a reduction of working hours, and the individual should expect to make up the time lost. For example, it may be possible for a Muslim to take an extended lunch break on a Friday to attend a Mosque, with the lost time being made up at another time. Similarly, it may be possible to schedule the Friday attendance of a Jew to finish before sunset, but with an earlier start time or extended day(s) elsewhere in the week. A similar arrangement should be considered for a Catholic who is unable to attend a Mass outside of working hours on a day of Obligation.

People wishing to request time off for prayer should follow their local process and should always approach their line manager in the first instance.

**Q. I would like to use a BT room for prayers, how do I know where to go in my building/ the building I am visiting?**

**A.** Although there is no requirement to set aside rooms specifically for prayer, some BT buildings will have a room which is typically used for this purpose. If this is not the cases, then a small meeting room may be booked – this should be for the minimum half hour period and ideally at times where this is least likely to restrict business use – e.g. during the lunch period. BT is identifying on major building websites those rooms which are, or are most suitable to be used as prayer/quiet rooms, and where such rooms are noted these should be the first choice where a room booking is being considered

People who wish to have additional storage facilities to store religious artefacts for on site use, should contact their local facilities management team for advice.

**Q. Will BT's catering facilities meet the dietary requirements of my religion?**

- A.** BT's approach to catering is to aim to provide a range of foods in line with demand, taking into account the cost of doing so. Where there is sufficient local demand, and where it is practical to do so, it may be possible to provide alternative products to meet specific requirements, although there can be no guarantee that this will be the case. People who wish alternative foods to be provided by their local catering facilities should contact the catering manager in the first instance.

**Q. How do I ensure I do not discriminate when filling a vacancy?**

- A.** There are many steps that can help ensure all potentially suitable candidates are attracted to and provided equal opportunity to be successful in job vacancies, for example:
- consider if you need to adapt methods of recruitment; being flexible around interview dates and times would be good practice.
  - be aware of the impact of different religious practices – e.g. some people may prefer not to shake hands with a member of the opposite sex or make eye contact.
  - make sure that job applicants are clear about what the post actually entails. This should give applicants the opportunity to consider fully whether there is any chance the job might conflict with their religious or belief convictions, enabling them to make an informed decision about whether to apply.

You can find more guidance on ensuring fairness in recruitment in the Resourcing section of the HR website at <http://humanresources.intra.bt.com>.

**Q. I would like to leave work earlier than my normal scheduled finish time because of my religious commitments, can I do this?**

- A.** BT has a wide range of flexible working policies which aim to help people and BT create a balance between the operational needs of the business and the personal lives of our people. These can be found on the Achieving the Balance website at <http://achievingthebalance.intra.bt.com>

**Q. Are there any security implications resulting from religion?**

- A.** At some BT buildings, for example where there is a particularly high level of security due to the operational nature of the site (e.g. BT Tower), there may be additional checks and requirements in place which could be affected by some elements of religious observance, e.g. dress. People who visit such buildings, and who wish to observe religious dress requirements which may have security implications, should contact the buildings security team in advance to discuss arrangements.

The BT security policy includes guidelines to ensure that Amritdhari Sikhs wearing the Kirpan are able to gain entry into BT buildings. For further information, please see the security policy at <http://securitypolicy.intra.bt.com/policy.asp?first=yes&ssid=185&id=532&subsubsectionid=8>.

**Q. Are Sikh men allowed to wear a turban and not a safety helmet while working for BT?**

- A.** Sikhs who are wearing turbans can choose to be exempted from wearing a safety helmet when engaged on BT construction work (see ISIS SFY/CSP/D019). Sikhs who wish to adopt this option must complete a registration form, which explains their rights, and the limitations to any compensation payment in the event of a head injury. When they have completed the registration process they will be exempt from this requirement. This only applies to Sikh men in law, and does not extend to other religion/beliefs. If any other individuals believe that they should be exempt, they should contact Health and Safety for advice.



**Q. One of my people has said that they find the use of certain language, including blaspheming, offensive. What should I do?**

**A.** In a professional, inclusive working environment, people should always be mindful of the impact of their language and attitude on others, and of the potential to cause offence. This is particularly so in respect of religion ,and people should respond sensitively and positively to feedback received. Further details can be found in BT's policy on Harassment and Bullying at [http://humanresources.intra.bt.com/hrbv-bin/hrbv/hr\\_subsection.jsp?cont\\_OID=-8368&sec\\_OID=-8361](http://humanresources.intra.bt.com/hrbv-bin/hrbv/hr_subsection.jsp?cont_OID=-8368&sec_OID=-8361)

**Q. I disagree with BT's sponsorship and policies on lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people as it is against my beliefs.**

**A.** BT's approach to equal opportunities and diversity is based on an inclusive approach for everyone. We treat everyone with dignity and respect, and the support of events such as Mardi Gras and the Kaleidoscope are an important demonstration to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender colleagues and customers of our commitment to treat everyone fairly and with respect. In addition, legislation introduced in Britain in December 2003 protects people from discrimination on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

*The above questions and answers have been developed to cover off some frequently asked questions from both individuals and managers, but the best way to find out is through discussion with the individual. BT's policies and practices aim to treat all people with dignity and respect at all times. In particular, BT's policies on Harassment and bullying, equal opportunities and diversity, and flexible working should be helpful in providing an inclusive environment where all people can contribute fully to the business.*

**Produced by: BT HR**

Nov 2003