

Christianity has “lost status” because of equality and human rights legislation, say evangelical Christians

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An Equality and Human Rights Commission report has found that "some Christian employers, service users and providers" believe Christianity has "lost status" because of equality laws.

In a [new report](#) published by the EHRC into the personal experiences of employees, employers and service providers concerning "religion or belief" in the workplace, many respondents described workplaces as an "inclusive environment" where they could take time off for religious holidays and discuss religion with employees or customers.

However, some "employees and students" claimed to have "encountered hostile and unwelcoming environments" either because they were not religious, or because of a religious faith they held, whilst some Christians criticised equality and human rights law, blaming it for Christianity 'losing status' in the UK.

The report drew attention to "some evangelical Christians [who] felt that Christian beliefs had lost their place in society and that this made it more difficult for them to express these beliefs in the workplace and in service delivery." This group of respondents felt there was now "less respect for religious beliefs." The EHRC found that some respondents "wanted to be able to discriminate on the basis of their religion in employment (for example, when recruiting new staff) and when providing goods, services and facilities."

Mark Hammond, CEO of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said the Commission would use the evidence to "examine how effective the law is in this area".

Stephen Evans, campaigns manager for the National Secular Society, said: "Christians fearing that Christianity has lost its status is not a valid reason for revisiting our equality laws. We've got a good equality framework in the UK which means people's religion and beliefs are being accommodated so far as is reasonable, and competing demands are being balanced. Britain is a better, fairer, place for it.

"However, what emerges from the report is a clear sense that there are some evangelical Christians who really do feel they have a right to express and manifest discriminatory beliefs in the workplace. Religious beliefs are a personal, private matter, and discrimination, whether derived from religious beliefs or not, has no place at work.

The EHRC report found that respondents had "encountered hostile and unwelcoming environments in relation to holding, or not holding, a religion or belief". It also heard that "pupils with and without religious beliefs ... described being mocked and ridiculed by teachers because of their beliefs."

Whilst many people felt able to take time-off for religious holidays, "non-religious staff were resentful when they believed that religious colleagues received more favourable treatment in

relation to time off and time away from work." The report also noted that tensions arose for staff when "religious colleagues used spaces (e.g. meeting rooms) that were not meant solely for religious purposes."

Certain religious beliefs were also found to be causing problems in workplaces, with employers and managers concerned that some types of religious observance "led to reduced productivity and health and hygiene concerns". The report gives the examples of "employees fainting when fasting" and "infection control issues arising from the desire to wear headscarves in surgical theatres."

Additionally, some managers "felt that it was difficult to discuss religious beliefs and observances with some staff in a reasonable way without them making a complaint."

Some Christian employees raised 'conscience' objections to being "directly involved" in the marriage of same-sex couples, and asked to "look again" at the concept of "sufficient accommodation" for religious beliefs in the workplace. There were also complaints from some groups that sexual orientation 'trumped' religious beliefs.

NSS president Terry Sanderson said: "I think it is important to emphasise that the group of 'evangelical Christians' who are creating this controversy are small in number and not likely to be representative of the average Christian in the workplace. Their constant agitating should not result in the Equality Act being compromised.

"The previous Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams criticised them for being unreasonable and [told them to 'grow up'](#)."

Many responses were concerned with how to deal with "harassment, unwelcome proselytising and discrimination", and the EHRC note that this was "especially the case when discriminatory views were expressed about women and LGBT staff."

There were particular problems in health and social care, with respondents "concerned about practitioners outlining their own beliefs to vulnerable patients and clients." One doctor was recently stripped of their license to practice medicine after performing an [exorcism on a mentally ill patient](#).

The provision of vital services by religious groups was also raised in the consultation, with the "limited availability of care homes which were not run with a religious ethos" receiving criticism.

The EHRC also received calls for better labelling of food to take better account of consumers' beliefs, to allow them to make more informed choices.

[The full report can be read here](#)

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