Find out how to gauge whether a recruiter is inclusive when it comes to faith issues. An organisation’s HR and equal opportunities policies will give you an insight into its culture.

**Finding employers positive about your religion and beliefs**

When you’re planning your career and looking for jobs, try to celebrate your religious and cultural beliefs. Highlight how they make you the individual that you are.

Many employers recognise the business advantages of recruiting diverse workforce, and the benefits include:

- new perspectives, styles and approaches to problem-solving
- a wider range of skills, expertise and knowledge
- a workforce with a range of interpersonal skills

Generally, you will find that public-sector organisations and companies with well developed human resources (HR) departments have made the greatest effort to incorporate recent legislation on religion and belief into their own policies. Many smaller organisations will also have developed equally inclusive policies.

You should be aware that HR policies do not always dictate day-to-day practice within the organisation, and staff may not always comply with the company’s guidelines. However, HR policies are there to protect you for this very reason.

**What to look for**

When looking for positive employers, find out about an organisation’s HR policies and also the underlying culture of the organisation. For example, does the organisation:

- Have an equal opportunities policy? If so, what does the policy say about their approach to religion and belief? Most organisations will include a reference to religious beliefs but sometimes you need to dig a little deeper.
- Comply with the Equality Act and has referenced this fact?
- Have a specific policy relating to faith issues? Is there any explicit information on dress, periods of fasting, flexible leave to cover religious holidays, serving alcohol during staff social events, etc?
- Employ a range of staff from diverse backgrounds and cultures?
- Provide space for prayer and reflection?
- Have a dedicated equality and diversity officer? If so, then it is likely that they take issues around faith and belief seriously.
- Have a website or recruitment literature that includes staff profiles? Do these profiles reflect diversity, eg are there any individuals pictured in religious dress?
- Have any religious societies?

It is sometimes possible to visit the organisation and speak to staff members prior to interview. Does the atmosphere and culture you experience during this visit have an inclusive approach to diversity and embracing a range of belief systems? Is it the sort of atmosphere you would feel happy to work in?
Disclosing your religion and beliefs
Always think positively. First and foremost, you are offering the employer a wide range of skills, knowledge and expertise and this should be your main focus.

Discussing your religion or beliefs with an employer
There is no legal requirement for you to tell your employer about your religious beliefs. Disclosing such information is a matter of choice and you can choose not to reveal your faith or beliefs to your employer and colleagues.

Questions relating to religion and belief should not be included on an application form. They may be included on a separate equal opportunities monitoring form, which is detached from the main form.

You may want to tell your employer and colleagues about your religious beliefs; sometimes sharing details about your personal life can help to build working relationships.

Your religion might affect your job
You may need your employer, and your colleagues, to understand that your religious faith and practice require certain adjustments to your working life. Examples include:

- arranging a quiet area to pray at certain times of day
- rearranging your work schedule during periods of fasting
- negotiating time off with your employer to celebrate certain religious festivals

In order to lead a successful and fulfilling working life, it is important that you feel able to express yourself in relation to these, and other, issues. The employer has a duty to make reasonable adjustments for you although no legal duty to facilitate them.

On your CV and application form
Your adherence to your religious beliefs and practices may well have assisted in developing work-related skills and qualities in ways you would like the employer to know about. For example, your involvement in your local church community may have enhanced your interpersonal and organisational skills, and may provide excellent examples of competencies at the application stage.

It is a good idea to use a range of different examples from your life when describing relevant skills and qualities for a job and examples taken from spiritual and religious pastimes could be ideal as a part of this.

At the interview
If you have done your research on the organisation’s equality policies, you should feel able to raise any issues you have regarding your religion or beliefs.

Try to anticipate any possible concerns the employer might have about recruiting someone with particular religious convictions. Even though there is legislation in place to protect your rights, you may still want to make the employer aware of your beliefs and deal with any potential concerns they may have.

Remember the following
Regardless of an organisation’s commitment to recruiting a diverse workforce, they may still need to be educated on how your faith or spirituality impacts on your working life. Be ready to do this.
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- Reassure the employer that there will be no negative impact on your work performance because of your beliefs.
- Talk about how your faith impacts positively on your life and your potential as an employee.
- Understand the relevant legislation and be ready to remind the employer, if necessary, of their obligations to you. If they are already well informed, it is likely that they will have practices in place to accommodate religious diversity. If they are not, they may welcome the information you are able to provide on accommodating people with different faiths.

**Post-interview**
In a diverse workforce, the confidence to be able to be open about one’s religious or belief system is an important part of working life. It is up to you how much you choose to share with others about your life and beliefs.

**Your rights around religion**
The main law against religious discrimination is the [Equality Act 2010](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/12/contents). This act brought together existing regulations against religious discrimination and other forms of discrimination into a single act to make the law simpler and remove any inconsistencies.

The law prohibits discrimination in employment and vocational training on the grounds of religion or belief. This applies to discrimination on grounds of religion, or religious or philosophical belief.

It covers discrimination on grounds of perceived as well as actual religion or belief (ie assuming – correctly or incorrectly – that someone has a particular religion or belief). The law also covers association – being discriminated against on grounds of the religion or belief of those with whom you associate, for example friends and/or family.

The law prohibits:

- **direct discrimination** – treating people less favourably than others on the grounds of religion or belief
- **associative discrimination** – treating people less favourably than others because they associate with someone of a particular religion or belief
- **discrimination by perception** – direct discrimination against someone because it is believed they hold a particular religion or belief
- **indirect discrimination** – applying a provision, criterion or practice which disadvantages people of a religion or belief and which is not justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim
- **harassment** – unwanted conduct that violates people's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment
- **victimisation** – treating people less favourably because of something they have done under or in connection with the Equality Act, eg made a formal complaint of discrimination or given evidence in a tribunal case
**When the law applies**
The law applies throughout the employment relationship:
- during the recruitment process
- in the workplace
- on dismissal
- (in certain circumstances) after the employment has finished, eg when future employers request references

The law also applies during any vocational training relationship: during the application process, in the place of training, and, in some cases, after the vocational training has finished.

Employers are now expected to incorporate the following into their organisational practice:
- dress code
- break policy
- flexible scheduling, eg avoiding important religious festivals when interviewing
- religious leave
- social interaction, e.g. acknowledging that some applicants will avoid eye contact for religious reasons and some may not wish to shake hands

The most common areas for discriminatory practice are likely to revolve around:
- where jobs are advertised
- recruitment processes
- interview days (festivals/Friday afternoons)
- training schedules (weekend residentialss)
- team/staff meetings (festivals/Friday afternoons)
- annual leave
- job appraisals
- promotion

Again, it needs to be remembered that the employer is expected to make reasonable adjustments and consider each request in this light.

**Further information**

**Equality Act 2010**
[https://www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance](https://www.gov.uk/equality-act-2010-guidance)