

Some of the workshop's meetings were held at Oxford University's Public Policy Unit, part of its Department of Politics and International Relations

Bringing disciplines together to consider religious accommodation

What account should a liberal democratic state take of the religious convictions of its citizens? This was the key question underlying a workshop led by political philosophers Peter Jones and Stuart White on religion, discrimination and accommodation between 2008 and 2009 and funded by the [Religion and Society Programme](#). There are those who argue that the state should be faith blind, but the British state clearly is not: there are state funded faith schools, legal exemptions, e.g. for Jews and Muslims for the ritual slaughter of animals, and protections. How the state can treat all of its citizens fairly given the fact of religious diversity is a live issue. Since 2003 Parliament has enacted important measures providing against direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, and in 2006 it passed the Race and Religious Hatred Act. There have also been important developments in case law, including in human rights law relating to religion.

Against this backdrop, Peter and Stuart organised four timely interdisciplinary meetings focusing in turn on:

1. Why and how does religion have special significance/deserve special protection?
2. Religion, discrimination and employment
3. General rules and special cases
4. Religious sensibilities 'versus' freedom of expression?

The meetings involved early career researchers, postgraduates, a representative from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and member of the House of Lords, Raymond Plant, as well as academics including Maleiha Malik and Tariq Modood. Two other Religion and Society network award holders, David Lehmann and Jonathan Seglow also participated, alongside Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Sikh and Humanist representatives. Mejjindarpal Kaur, Director of United Sikhs and a barrister, was able to shed light on the little known struggles of Sikhs in France following the *Affaire du Foulard* (headscarf affair) having been personally involved in subsequent legal cases. She provided an insider's view of what Sikhs are facing.

Several disciplines including Sociology, Political Science and Management were represented in the workshop, but a key achievement was bringing Political Philosophy and Law together. Generally, experts focus on either the normative principles at stake or the legal detail, but both are needed for understanding the issues. Taking religion as simply part of 'culture' can obscure issues and features particular to it. Nonetheless, research taking place through the workshop is significant for 'multiculturalism' since the issues of cultural diversity most prominent and difficult for public policy frequently have their origins in religious belief.

Following on from the workshop, Peter Jones has advised the EHRC on the establishment of its research network on religion and belief, and assisted Linda Woodhead on the planning of a series of seminars for the EHRC on religion or belief. Workshop members are producing publications influenced by their participation (see below).

Find out more...

- Look up the special issue on Religion and Freedom of Expression of *Res Publica* edited by Peter Jones based on workshop papers (2011, vol. 17, no 1): <http://www.springerlink.com/content/1356-4765/17/1/>
- Access the programme for the third meeting here: http://ppu.politics.ox.ac.uk/materials/Prog_State_Rel.pdf
- Read the paper presented by Prakash Shah here: <http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/savifadok/volltexte/2009/228/pdf/universalrelig.pdf>
- Take a look at workshop participant Iain McLean's book *What's Wrong with the British Constitution?* (OUP, 2009), Chapter 13 of which 'Established Churches' was influenced by his participation: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Whats-Wrong-British-Constitution-McLean/dp/0199546959>
- Look up John Horton's article 'Realism, liberal moralism and a political theory of modus vivendi' in the *European Journal of Political Theory* (2009, vol. 9, no 4, 431-448) also influenced by workshop participation: <http://ept.sagepub.com/content/9/4/431.abstract>
- Download academic lawyer and participant Maleiha Malik's paper 'From Conflict to Cohesion' for the Equality and Diversity Forum: <http://www.edf.org.uk/blog/?p=1803>
- Contact Peter Jones (<http://www.ncl.ac.uk/gps/staff/profile/p.n.jones>) or Stuart White (<http://www.politics.ox.ac.uk/index.php/profile/stuart-white.html>).

You might also be interested in...

- Reading about Jonathan Seglow's Religion and Society funded research network on religion, justice and well-being: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2011_03/1301396812_Seglow_Phase_1_Network.pdf
- Looking at findings from David Lehmann's network on secularism also funded by Religion and Society: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/research_findings/featured_findings/secularism_means_very_different_things_in_different_times_and_places
- Accessing the report produced for the Equality and Human Rights Commission on religion or belief from a series of expert seminars: http://www.religionandsociety.org.uk/uploads/docs/2010_01/1262791486_48_'Religion_or_belief'_Identifying_issues_and_priorities.pdf
- The EHRC's religion or belief network: <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/publications/our-research/research-services/>



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Project Details

Award Title

Religion, Discrimination and Accommodation: the Role of the State in a Multi-Faith Society

Team

Principal Investigator: Prof Peter Jones (Newcastle)

University

Newcastle University

Research Partners

Dr Stuart White (Oxford)

Award Type

Phase 1 Network & Workshop Grant

Key terms

law, political philosophy, religious accommodation, rights, freedom