



Creating a **faith-friendly** **workplace** for Muslims



Comisiwn
Cydraddoldeb a
Hawliau Dynol

Equality and
Human Rights
Commission

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Introduction

Having a job is highly valued. It gives a sense of purpose, confidence and self-esteem as well as providing security and an ability to provide for yourself and family members. Meeting colleagues from different backgrounds builds understanding, widens perspectives and contributes to creating cohesive communities.

These positive feelings and a sense of well-being and belonging may be absent for those who are excluded from the labour market or who don't feel comfortable or valued in work.

It is important for those of us who believe in equality of opportunity to know who has work and who progresses in work. It is equally important to know who is not in employment and to find out why this may be.

We know that employment rates of Muslims in Wales are very low – they are least likely to be working of all faith groups. So we decided to look into this further, gathering more facts and talking to Muslims who are in work as well as some who are not, and to Welsh employers and academics too. We wanted to find out why Muslim employment rates are so low, why this matters, and what can be done to change the picture. We want to explore the business benefits too.

We are delighted that many individuals and organisations from the public, private and voluntary sectors want to work with us. For some it is about promoting equality of opportunity, others are motivated to fill skill gaps and find talented people whatever their background.

We thank those who have worked with us already and invite everyone to engage in discussion with us to reduce employment gaps and encourage more faith-friendly workplaces across Wales.



June Milligan

Commissioner for Wales

Kate Bennett

National Director Wales

Is Wales Fairer?

In December 2015 the Commission published *Is Wales Fairer?* This identifies the top equality and human rights challenges facing the nation. One of the challenges relates to employment. We found that some groups of people are much more likely than others to secure work, and that this does not reflect the knowledge, skills and talents of the people in question.

Is Wales Fairer? highlighted the low employment rates of Muslims in Wales – they are least likely to be working of all faith groups. This is despite the proportion of Muslim adults with a degree being slightly above the Welsh average.

Today there are many highly-skilled, well-educated, young Muslims who could be of great benefit to the Welsh economy.

Forty-nine percent of the Muslim population is under the age of twenty-five. This is a young population and a valuable resource for the Welsh labour market. So a discussion about Muslims and employment is timely.

This report explores creating faith-friendly workplaces for Muslims, as the evidence within *Is Wales Fairer?* found that Muslims have the lowest economic activity rates of all faiths.

The Commission will be publishing GB guidance on Religion or Belief in the workplace later in 2016.

We found a great deal of interest in this work – from Muslims and groups who want to see change, from employers who are trying hard to attract Muslim staff but are finding it difficult, and from many who have not really thought about this problem at all. Our report includes facts, employer case studies and some useful suggestions for employers that want to create a faith-friendly workplace for Muslims.

We are pleased to be publishing this summary of our work so far and we are greatly encouraged, and confident, that working together we can find solutions that benefit individuals, businesses and public service.

The main emerging theme is that there are business benefits in creating faith-friendly workplaces that embrace an understanding of the importance of religion in some people's lives and put in place practical measures to support this.

Along with our digital story we plan to use this learning to raise awareness and to widen the discussion to identify next steps to increasing employment rates of Muslims.

Faith-friendly organisations go beyond minimum legal requirements and seek to attract, welcome, support and retain people of all faiths.

What is a faith-friendly workplace and where are you now?

Miller and Ewest (2014)¹ provide a framework for describing how organisations can be characterised in relation to religion:

- Faith-avoiding - organisations see the inclusion of faith in the workplace as being problematic and counterproductive
- Faith-based - organisations that are grounded in one particular faith
- Faith-safe - organisations comply with legal minimum standards
- Faith-friendly - organisations go beyond the minimum legal requirements, proactively welcoming and seeing the business benefits of appropriate displays of all faiths at work.

You may wish to consider which description currently characterises your organisation and whether that is how you wish to be seen.

If the goal is to attract staff from a wider range of religious faiths to increase opportunity or for business reasons, steps can be taken to become faith-friendly.

Creating a faith-friendly organisation can include:

- Developing and promoting a workplace policy for religion and belief that embraces all beliefs and promotes a culture of respect
- Having an all-faith staff network that provides a forum for peer support and celebrates diversity
- Implementing all-staff training on different religions and beliefs to help create a culture change and explore stereotypes and assumptions about different faiths
- Exploring how employees can maintain their faith in the workplace
- Promoting different religious events to encourage the integration of faith and work for all religions and beliefs.

Wales TUC

The Wales TUC is working with Trade Unions to ensure that Welsh workplaces are faith-friendly. A Trade Union rep may be the first point of contact for a person experiencing discrimination in the workplace, or they may also be an instrumental figure in changing the workplace culture to ensure that it is more faith-friendly.

Trade Unions have been active in creating positive, faith-friendly workplace initiatives, raising awareness and helping to develop workplace policies, some having specific branches for faith workers. Trade Unions have negotiated on behalf of members to arrange time off for religious holidays or changes to working patterns to suit religious requirements. They have published guidance on faith based discrimination and created policy guidelines on religious attire in the workplace.

¹ Miller, D and Ewest, T (2014) The faith-friendly workplace: A contextual consideration of organisational frames in light of increased religious opacity, diversity and expression at work.

Business benefits

Muslims have the lowest employment rates of all faiths.

There is a wealth of skilled and talented people who are not effectively engaged in the Welsh workforce. Welsh organisations and businesses could benefit from this growing section of potential labour force.

Muslim women and men can offer valuable skills to the Welsh economy. They are younger and, far from being uneducated, are slightly more likely to have a degree than the Welsh average.

Organisations that promote diversity report an increase in employee satisfaction, productivity and retention. Encouraging diversity can make staff feel valued and respected. The organisation has an opportunity to promote its values.

Employers told us they want to find ways to enable Muslim employees to practise their faith in the workplace. They reported this is beneficial in terms of attracting a wider talent pool and ensuring their workplaces represent the wider community and customer base.

The Muslims we spoke to had positive attitudes to work. There was a strong desire to find work and be able to contribute to the Welsh economy.



The Muslim population in Wales

The 2011 census provides us with a snapshot of the Welsh population. In the decade since 2001 the Muslim population has doubled to 46,000 people. Islam is the second largest faith group in Wales.

Ethnicity

The Muslim population in Wales is diverse - just over half of the Muslims in Wales (55 per cent) state an Asian/Asian British background.

The other half comprises Black/African/Caribbean/Black British (10 per cent), White (8 per cent), Mixed/Multiple ethnic group (5 per cent) or Other Ethnic group (22 per cent).

Age

49% of the Muslim population in Wales is under the age of 25.

30% of the overall population of Wales is under the age of 25.

It is a young population with 4% of Muslims in Wales aged over 65 compared with 18% of everyone in Wales.

Qualifications

27% Muslims in Wales have a degree compared to

25% of all people living in Wales.

23% of Welsh Muslims have no qualifications compared to

26% of all people living in Wales.

Labour market

69% of Muslims aged 16 to 24 in Wales are economically active.

86% of all people aged 16 to 24 in Wales are economically active.

67% of Muslims aged 25 to 49 in Wales are economically active.

85% of all people aged 25 to 49 in Wales are economically active².

These are the lowest economic activity rates of all faiths.

² Welsh Government (2015). A statistical focus on religion in Wales, 2011 Census



Getting into work

The Muslims we spoke to had positive attitudes to work. There was a strong desire to find work and be able to contribute to the Welsh economy – both from people who are employed and from those who had not been able to find paid work.

You may want to think about how you recruit new staff. Can you do things differently to attract and encourage more Muslim applicants?

We asked those we spoke to about what could be done differently. The suggestions we received included encouraging employers to:

- Attend mosque open days and agree to hold job fairs within them
- Develop relationships with schools and young people from Muslim communities and provide work experience opportunities
- Encourage and provide volunteer options for Muslim women and men
- Provide mentors during recruitment drives
- Build relationships with organisations and groups that work with Muslim communities e.g. the Muslim Council of Wales iLead Youth Leadership Programme

What matters in work?

The basis of people prospering in work is feeling welcome, valued and treated fairly, similarly to their colleagues. Often Muslims felt that this was not the case. This knocked their confidence and when something went wrong in work it was easier to walk away than resolve the matter.

Not every Muslim's behaviour will be informed by their faith and not every Muslim will practise their religion in the same way. The Muslim faith is an eclectic mix and how devoted a person is, their national origin, culture and personal choices will all play a part.

A consistent list of topics was identified by the Muslim women and men we spoke to as being important in developing a faith friendly workplace. This included:

The value of socialising

The workplace – along with school, college and university – is one of the most likely places for us all to meet people of different backgrounds to ourselves. Early research commissioned and published by EHRC Wales (Who Do You See? October 2008) found that discriminatory attitudes are least likely to be held by those with the widest social networks. An engaged workforce is known to be more productive and high levels of engagement are often achieved by building strong bonds between staff through informal and social interaction.

It is particularly important that all staff have the chance to become involved in social activity around a workplace if the rewards of higher productivity and greater cohesion are to be achieved. A range of activities will increase the chance of appealing to everyone.

Eye contact and shaking hands

There can be cultural differences around handshaking and direct eye contact. It is not about being impolite and often it can be helpful to wait and see if a hand shake is offered.

BT

BT recognises and celebrates the importance of creating an inclusive working environment. Its people networks, including the Muslim Network, are promoted in recruitment drives and enable potential employees to see they can combine work with practicing their faith. This has helped develop a more diverse workforce and bringing in new talent has filled skill gaps.

The Muslim Network has over 400 members. It brings people together, supports staff development and has senior leadership buy-in. The Muslim Network holds internal workshops and open-dialogue sessions for Muslim and non-Muslim staff to increase awareness and understanding. Topics have included food and fasting, and Muslim festivals, and have enabled cultural differences to be explored safely. It has also worked closely with the business to increase the number of quiet rooms in BT buildings; this has had a positive impact for those wanting somewhere to pray but also others who might just need a quiet place for a few minutes.

Each of these initiatives has helped remove misconceptions and improve understanding between employees of different faiths within the workplace – as well as with those of no faith. This approach has given BT a better insight into, and understanding of, their customer base.

“Working for a company where I can practise my faith and feel valued and respected while doing so, has been instrumental in ensuring that I stay at BT – it makes me want to give something back.” BT employee.

Clothing and appearance

Dressing modestly is important for many Muslims.

For some Muslim men this often means being covered from the navel to the knee, having a beard and/or wearing a small skullcap.

Muslim women may wish to cover their hair and wear loose, non-revealing clothing.

Women may wear a headscarf (called a hijab) that covers their hair and neck.

A small number may cover their face and whole body, except for hands and feet, as an expression of their faith (niqab).

Having conversations about wearing shorter-length hijabs or having them tied in a different way can alleviate concerns around health and safety.

South Wales Police

South Wales Police launched the representative workforce programme in May 2015. It emerged from the Police and Crime Commissioner's thematic review and identified four key elements:

- attract
- support
- employ
- retain/progress

An "attract" strategy was designed to promote careers in policing amongst disadvantaged groups, including Muslims. As part of their E-marketing approach, a number of myths about the Police are addressed. The myths may have resulted in the Police being discounted as a potential employer by some groups.

For example, photos online and in presentations now show female police officers wearing headscarves as well as longer and looser tops. This has assisted in breaking down perceived barriers for Muslim women wanting to join the Police.

South Wales Police has seen an increase in the number of BME applicants rise from 2.9% to 6.1%.

"Increased outreach work allowed me to see the vast range of employment opportunities within the Police service. My faith was recognised as a strength to enable a deeper understanding of the community that South Wales Police serve. Since becoming a PCSO I have a good career where I am able to make a difference. People in my community are happy to see a Muslim officer as someone they can relate to." South Wales Police employee.

Prayers

Many Muslims pray five times a day. The importance of this for Muslims is indicated by its status as one of the five pillars of Islam.

During a typical working day (i.e. 9am - 5pm) employers can expect Muslim employees to pray twice. This will be around noon and late afternoon, although this is flexible and it may be possible for staff to combine these prayers.

Each prayer time takes a maximum of 15 minutes, including the time needed to wash faces, hands and feet with clean water.

Prayers should take place somewhere that is clean and quiet. This can be in a prayer room or a dedicated space, such as an unused office or a meeting room. Providing a space means Muslim employees don't have to worry about finding a place to pray, or explaining themselves or being interrupted or embarrassed.

Friday prayers are particularly important and may take a little longer than other prayer times. These prayers take place at noontime and include an address or sermon. Friday prayers are to be said in congregation and may require travel to the nearest mosque.

Friday prayers can take place in an extended lunch break. This time can be made up by coming in earlier or staying late.

Washing facilities

Before praying Muslims will perform Ablution which includes the washing of hands, arms and feet. For some a hand basin is adequate for performing the Ablution. Others may use a small plastic basin and jug.

In using the toilet Muslim staff may prefer to clean themselves with clean running water. A small jug, which can be kept in a cubicle, is sufficient for this.



Cardiff and Vale College

In developing its £45 million state of the art campus, Cardiff and Vale College has designed an inclusive space for students, staff and visitors.

The college ensured there is designated space for prayers. The two prayer rooms provide a quiet and respectful place for staff and students to use. There are separate wash facilities for women and men.

The space is shared and people of all faiths are welcome to use it. This creates a sense of shared ownership and mutual pride in the area. The prayer room facilities have helped the College to build links with the local community and with other organisations who hire space for meetings and events. The prayer room is an additional reason for choosing to use the College.

College employees have flexible working arrangements which enable prayer time to be built into the working day. Staff appreciate being supported so that they can practise their faith. It is seen as demonstrating a strong commitment to equality.

“Cardiff and Vale College has been proactive and taken time to understand my fundamental need. This has helped to create an inclusive and environment and culture that is fully inclusive and has been instrumental to me staying at the College.” Cardiff and Vale College Employee.



Ramadan

Muslim staff may observe Ramadan (fasting) for one month a year. The start and finish dates are based on the Islamic lunar calendar and change from year to year by about ten days. As with Easter, Ramadan can be predicted well in advance.

During Ramadan many Muslims will not eat or drink from dawn to sunset. The fast will be broken with a meal at sunset.

Most Muslim employees will work during Ramadan.

Food and alcohol

Many Muslims follow fairly strict rules about what to eat and drink. It may include not eating pork or drinking alcohol or coming into contact with them. It may include following certain standards in the preparation of meat to ensure it is Halal.

This can make it difficult for Muslims to work serving alcohol and pork products.

Muslim holidays

There are two significant holidays (Eid) when Muslim employees are likely to request annual leave.

Eid-ul-Fitr is at the end of Ramadan and fasting. It is for celebration. Extended families may get together and give presents to children.

Eid-ul-Adha is at the end of the Hajj (pilgrimage) and is usually two months after Eid-ul-Fitr.

The pilgrimage is one of the 'five pillars of Islam' and it is expected that Muslims will make the pilgrimage at least once in their life-time.



Creating a faith-friendly workplace for Muslims

Both the Muslims and the employers we spoke to were able to identify a range of practical steps to enable Muslims to feel welcome and confident about work. This means being able to combine faith with being a good and effective employee.

Acknowledging the central role that faith plays in the lives of some current and potential employees is essential when developing a faith friendly workplace.

Based on our discussions and the guidance published by others, here are some ideas to consider. Dialogue is particularly important and enables employers to send out messages that Muslims are welcome and will be supported in work.

We invite you to consider these. Would they work for you? Are there other ideas to consider? We would greatly appreciate feedback from all.



Some suggestions

- Let applicants and employees know that your workplace recognises different religions and beliefs.
- Value socialising in building strong bonds between staff. Have a range of activities to increase the chance of appealing to everyone.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences around handshaking and direct eye contact. It is not about being impolite.
- Consider how dress codes and uniforms can include headscarves where appropriate. Provide hair nets or masks if there are health and safety concerns regarding men's beards.
- Explore the feasibility of break times being adapted to allow for prayer time. Could extended lunch breaks on Fridays to attend prayers - with time made up earlier in the week - be possible?
- Look for a clean and quiet space for prayers – a space shared by all faiths can be an advantage.
- Talk with staff about fasting during Ramadan. Discuss if it's helpful to hold meetings in the morning or early afternoon or to let staff finish earlier if a lunch break is not taken.
- Where possible include halal food and/or vegetarian dishes in canteens or whenever food or snacks are provided for staff.
- Look at how staff can use two days annual leave to celebrate the Eid festivals that take place twice a year.
- Explore opportunities, such as unpaid leave, for staff who wish to take part in the ritual of pilgrimage.

Next steps

The Commission is committed to working with others to improve workplaces and to widen access to work for people of every background and identity. We are particularly concerned about those groups who are least likely to be employed at present.

We have identified the need for a strong focus on the employment of Muslims in Wales. Firstly, because they are least likely to be working despite being a highly educated, young segment of the population with a lot to offer employers. Secondly, the workplace is a very important place for building cohesion between people of different backgrounds and beliefs.

Getting further information

EHRC research and guidance

The Commission has research reports and guidance on religion and belief. This includes the report of our call for evidence which gathered a wide range of both positive and negative experiences of religion or belief in the workplace and service delivery. More information can be found on [our website](#).

The Centre has developed Cardiff University's first MOOC (Massive Open On-line Course) entitled 'Muslims in Britain: change and challenges.' This can be used to develop an understanding of Muslims and their faith through an exploration of communities in Wales. Further information can be found on the [Islam-UK-Centre website](#).

Islam-UK-Centre



Centre for the
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The Islam UK Centre is based in the Department of Religious and Theological Studies at Cardiff University. The Centre provides an accessible, vibrant and inclusive hub of learning about Islam in Cardiff, South Wales and the UK for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

Muslim Council of Wales



The Muslim Council runs a series of community engagement events including mosque open days and Islam exhibitions. Their iLead programme aims to develop young Muslim leaders. More information can be found on the [Muslim Council of Wales website](#).

Our mandate

Parliament gave the Commission the mandate to challenge discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and to protect and promote human rights.

Our mission

A catalyst for change and improvement on equality and human rights.

Contact us

This report and more information can be found at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/wales

or you can contact us on

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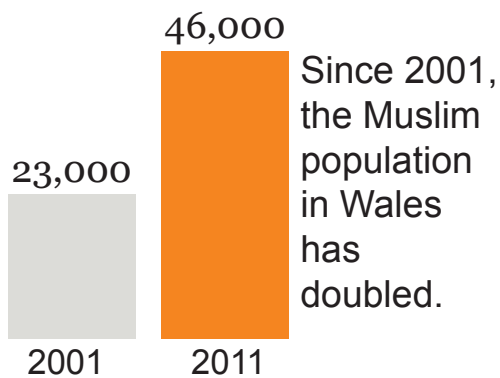
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The Muslim population in Wales



Islam is the second largest faith group in Wales.

Age

49% of the Muslim population in Wales is under the age of 25.

30% of the overall population of Wales is under the age of 25.

4% of the Muslim in Wales aged over 65.

18% of the overall population of Wales are aged over 65.

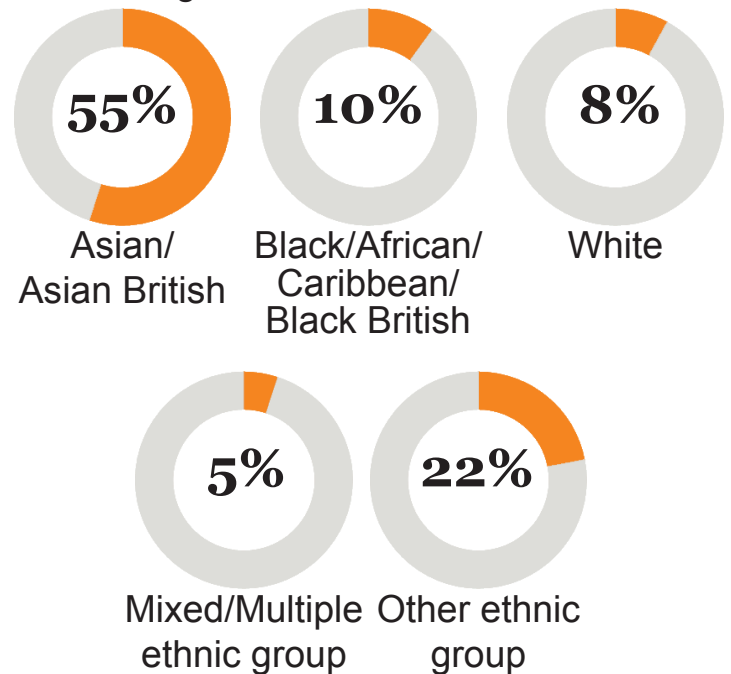
Labour market

- Muslim people in Wales who are economically active
- All people in Wales who are economically active

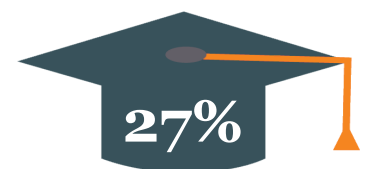


Ethnicity

Percentage of Muslims in Wales stating their background as:



Qualifications



Muslim people in Wales have a degree compared to 25% of all people living in Wales.

23%

of Welsh Muslim people have no qualifications compared to

26%

of all people living in Wales.

