

Ofcom
OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS



Religious Programmes

A report of the key findings of a qualitative research study

**Research study conducted by Counterpoint Research
on behalf of Ofcom**

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Foreword

Section 319 (1) of the Communications Act 2003 (“the Act”) requires Ofcom to set a Code which contains standards for the content of television and radio services. The Ofcom Broadcasting Code, published on 25 May 2005 takes effect on 25 July 2005¹. The Code applies to all broadcasters regulated by Ofcom, with certain exceptions in the case of the BBC (Sections Five, Six, Nine and Ten) and S4C (part of Section Six).

This independent research was commissioned by Ofcom from Counterpoint Research to assist in the consideration of points raised by the public consultation on the Ofcom Broadcasting Code which began in July 2004.

The draft Code (which can be found on the Ofcom web-site) contained a set of rules proposed by Ofcom to meet the objectives of the Act. The Act requires that the proper degree of responsibility is exercised regarding the content of religious programmes. The Act also requires that religious programmes should not involve any improper exploitation of any susceptibilities of the audience for such a programme or any abusive treatment of the religious views and beliefs of those belonging to a particular religion or denomination.

This research was undertaken, as part of the consultation process, to aid Ofcom in finalising the Code. The views of those with specific religious beliefs and with no religious belief were canvassed on a series of questions linked to that section.

The research was qualitative in nature. This means it explored in some depth the views of respondents in order to give directional steers to Ofcom. As it is not a quantitative study, the results cannot be extrapolated to represent the views of the wider population. It contributed to the policy considerations but is not in itself conclusive about how any individual issue should be treated. It is also the case that (unlike harm and offence) generally accepted standards are not applied to religious programmes.

The research conclusions were part of the information taken into account by Ofcom and in deciding what the supporting web-based guidance should be.

The research also explored opinions on religious broadcasting in general.

¹ With the exception of rule 10.17 which takes effect on July 1st 2005 when the Investment Recommendation (Media) Regulations come into force.

Section 1

Executive Summary

Current perceptions of religious programmes

- Respondents across all the groups², including Christians, followers of other faiths and non-believers tended to define religious programmes as those taking place in Christian churches, and involving worship or other religious ritual typically *Songs of Praise*. Impressions of such programmes were usually formed from having seen such programmes many years previously. There was some awareness of more 'modern' programmes such as *The Heaven and Earth Show*.
- Respondents spontaneously tried to broaden this narrow definition of religious programmes. Respondents across all the groups were very critical of 'traditional' religious programmes, seeing them as essentially just a service for the housebound and elderly, too often preaching at the audience rather than informing them. Having argued this, however, most felt that it was, in principle, a good thing that the UK broadcast schedules contained such Christian programmes. These views were shared by participants across the groups including non-believers.
- Other types of programmes which many respondents felt could usefully be included in a more modern, redefined 'religious programmes' category included documentaries about specific moral issues; programmes about religious and ethnic minorities; history programmes with a faith or belief based focus; and news and current affairs programmes.
- Many participants across the groups interviewed in the research saw current religious programming as being on the periphery of broadcasting output, comprising mostly traditional worship or niche output on non-terrestrial television channels and minority radio stations. They contrasted this with a strong interest in programmes which dealt with questions of faith, the manifestation of faith in culture, and particularly the role of religion in world politics, which they wanted to include in a broader definition of religious programmes.
- Most respondents contrasted the need for a more open perspective with 'traditional' religious programmes, which they criticised as insular and uninformative. They argued that such programmes should take a more robust and challenging approach, as well as be much more informative about all faiths and beliefs.

Definitions of religious programmes

- Respondents taking part in the focus groups felt that religious programmes should not just be about ritual and worship, but also about contemplation, meditation, and reflection. They felt that religious programmes needed to educate

² A broad cross-section of the UK population was included in the research, including weak, lapsed or non-believers of traditional religions, Christian believers (including denominations) and followers of major world faiths (Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Sikhism & Buddhism).

and broaden understanding, and should not be afraid to stretch and challenge the viewer or listener.

- In broad terms, three types of religious programmes were asked for, and felt to be needed generally by most viewers/listeners (whether they themselves had an active belief or not). They were as follows :
 - **Worship, or “personal stories”/witnessing:** these programmes would show personal faith in action, from a ‘committed’, subjective and involved point of view. They would show how an individual’s faith affected their lives, culture, and life in the widest sense. Respondents were also concerned that the views should reflect British culture.
 - **Informative or issue based:** Across all groups there was a real and spontaneously expressed concern that there should be more informative or issue based documentaries and debates, presenting views from a variety of faith or belief perspectives. In addition, respondents saw a role for more documentary-style programmes that showed aspects of their lives that are shared across the faiths but which are played out differently e.g. weddings, funerals. Similarly, they wanted to see programmes which explored world history from a faith or belief system point of view, particularly after 11 September 2001.
 - **Incorporation into mainstream genre:** There was a feeling that outside of ‘religious broadcasting’ there was far too little real reflection of how many people have a faith, and how much faith plays a part in their lives and everyday decision-making. There was also some discussion of how ‘moral tales’, even religious scripture, could be dramatised in a contemporary setting in dramas or soaps, particularly for children – since television was seen as particularly effective at harnessing interest and communicating ideas.
- Within the narrow definition of religious broadcasting initially defined by the respondents there was clearly little interest in religious broadcasting. Its social use was its main, if not only, function. However, within their broader definition of what could be considered religious programming there was keen interest and respondents argued that this type of output could be so much more important and improving at a much higher level.
- When considering the wider definition of religious programmes it was felt that all channels should and probably would want to make them. Certainly the BBC channels would be the most accessible, especially given the track record of highly regarded programmes such as *Thought For The Day* and *Pause For Thought*. In addition it was anticipated that those satellite channels which also have a track record at making quality, engaging programmes, specifically channels like Discovery, would be appropriate, as would the religious and ethnic channels.
- After reflecting on the issues, most respondents felt that they were currently poorly served and that they would have an appetite to watch a range of religious programmes using their broader definition of religious programming, which they felt could be challenging, give them an opportunity to reconsider things and also to stretch themselves.

- In its current form it was felt that religious broadcasting should be protected by regulation, especially as it provides a service to the housebound. The rationale was that religious broadcasting was perceived to have been so poor, and audience figures so low that there was therefore some need for protection.
- Respondents expected that if a broader range of programmes were made, audiences would engage in these programmes in much higher numbers, resulting in the need for lighter touch regulation.
- The general feeling was that there were far too few programmes that seriously covered issues such as life, death, sickness, tragedy, and morality- and of those that do cover these issues, many did so poorly. Within their broader definition of faith or belief based programmes there was a spontaneously identified role for this kind of programming.

General attitudes to regulation

- When thinking about regulatory issues, participants felt that faith or belief based programmes were quite different from mainstream programmes on a number of levels and therefore felt it was only right that separate rules should apply to such programmes.
- Respondents felt that audiences were far more 'open' when viewing or listening to such programmes and were often watched/listened to with 'suspended' critical disbelief. Religion was also felt to be a very sensitive issue and respondents were very worried indeed about the potential exploitation of audiences by "conmen". Respondents were nervous of the power that television in particular has to 'sell' and were very concerned that access to this medium be restricted and controlled.
- There was concern about a variety of types of people, including children, the elderly, lonely, depressed and isolated, all of whom respondents felt could be vulnerable to manipulation. Crucially, most felt that any viewer or listener could be vulnerable at some stage in their life.
- In almost all groups, respondents spontaneously came up with a set of rules which they felt should apply to programmes within this genre:
 - such programmes should properly explore alternative beliefs and views, and not be disrespectful or dismissive;
 - while such programmes should be able to take a light-hearted look at other faiths, cultures, values, morals and ethics, they should be mindful of others' views; specifically, such programmes should not be serious about one faith whilst being light-hearted about other faiths;
 - programmes about religion and faith should always be 'reasonable' and 'fair', i.e. should be very well researched and reliable in their portrayal of faith;
 - programme information should be provided for programmes outlining one faith so that the audience can frame their 'listening mode' appropriately;
 - faith-based programmes should present beliefs, culture and values without presenting them as being better than others; and
 - such programmes should not be allowed to 'preach', i.e. claim that theirs is the 'only' valid faith, and/or a faith which the audience should join.

- Having laid out such rules, respondents were very quick to argue that no programme could ever be ‘pure’ or ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ and that this field would always be one where judgement and shades of grey were common. Having laid down this cornerstone, they went on to argue that matters of faith will always involve strong feelings, and it will be likely that someone will ‘take offence’ when none was intended.

Perceptions of channels and platforms

Respondents saw three different types of channels/platforms:

- **Terrestrial television and radio:** Respondents felt the main provider of religious programming on terrestrial channels is mainly BBC One, but most argued that good quality satellite channels such as Discovery or National Geographic, as well as an entertainment-based channel such as ITV could easily produce good quality programming within the broader definition of religious programmes. Certainly such mainstream channels were expected to comply with all of the regulatory rules they suggested above.
- **Satellite and cable channels which are part of a package:** Participants felt the issue here was that individual ‘choice’ was not appropriate to the decision making process – the point of consumption is removed from the point of purchase, and in any case it was felt that broadcasters were adding new channels to packages all the time without informing subscribers properly. Thus, they felt that regulation should be the same as for terrestrial television. Ethnic minority respondents talked about ‘their’ channels in the context of satellite or cable channels that came as part of a package. They tended to argue that their religion was very tied up with their language, and that therefore much of their religious programming would have to come via the satellite channels, reasoning that it would be unfair to demand airtime for a foreign language based service on terrestrial channels.
- **Channels which have to be individually subscribed to:** In the context of specific channels where individuals made the choice to subscribe, many respondents tended to use the language of consumer choice. At this level there was some discomfort at insisting on the application of the same level of regulation to channels which have been designed for a particular interest, and which subscribers have to actively opt in to and pay for.
- At one level, respondents felt that rules and regulations should apply to all channels and platforms but the important issue was that any member of the audience could be vulnerable at any point and at a moment which was not the point at which they had made the decision to subscribe to any programme or channel package. Therefore, all of the protection provided by regulation should be available all of the time, regardless of channel.

Reactions to the draft Code

“Responsibility”

Throughout all the groups, respondents felt that programme makers and broadcasters should treat belief, faith and spirituality with seriousness and respect, unless the programme was specifically described as ‘light-hearted’ or a ‘comedy’. They expected that individual ‘voices’ would be balanced by objectivity, and within a discussion or debate type programme they anticipated contrasting and opposing views would be heard. Where balance wasn’t provided within the programme there should be clear programme information provided to this effect.

“Views and beliefs must not be abused”

In the context of views and beliefs, respondents expressed the need for programme makers and broadcasters to conduct proper research, and to ensure that participants, commentators or ‘voices’ within a programme would do the same.

“Due accuracy and fairness”

When asked about ‘due accuracy and fairness’ respondents thought that this should operate on a number of levels depending on the type of programming. Where the programme is more about ‘witnessing’, respondents felt that fairness and accuracy would be reliant upon the testimony, story or storyteller and thus not directly the responsibility of the broadcaster. In contrast, where the programme was an educational or informative documentary or discussion, respondents felt that the ‘normal’ rules of objectivity and fairness should apply, particularly given that belief was recognised as such a sensitive topic. For the third type of programme, where religious or faith-related topics were incorporated within mainstream programmes, respondents felt that there should be a requirement that storylines and characters should not be too ridiculous or extreme, as was sometimes the case in soaps.

“A programme espousing religious views or beliefs must make the identity of the religion and/or denomination clear”

The importance of providing information on the identity of the religion and/or denomination has already been identified as a priority by the respondents for the ‘witnessing’ type programmes. For discussions and documentaries respondents expected programme contributors to be identified, because in this context they judged it even more important to know who was putting forward a particular view, because of the potential for audiences to receive these programmes as authoritative statements. In relation to dramas, or other mainstream programmes with religious storylines or characters, respondents felt this was unnecessary as it would be ridiculous to reveal the plot in order to fulfil this part of the Code.

“Making the purpose clear when it is to convey religious views or seek recruits”

Across all groups this section of the Code caused absolute consternation, confusion and in the end, anger, following directly from the strength of their feelings, already repeatedly expressed, about how religious and faith based television should be used for sharing beliefs, not setting one set of beliefs over another or trying to persuade viewers and listeners to join that faith. They associated this kind of behaviour with the extremes of belief, not with a legitimate, active, open-minded, tolerant faith. Hence, they tended to react violently, disbelievingly and very, very negatively to the suggestion that this could be allowed.

Similarly, respondents were also very concerned with the proposition that programme-makers could be allowed to ask for donations. They felt that appeals for charity were already done well on television and asked why any community would want to raise money for themselves, rather than for a charity.

While most of these respondents were unhappy at the idea of recruitment per se and certainly in relation to terrestrial and bundled satellite or cable channels, some changed their deeply held views when considering individual opt-in channels. Most wanted the rules to apply across the board, even to opt-in channels, since the point of viewing was never the point of purchase, and because the viewer may have become more vulnerable since their original decision to subscribe.

“Should not improperly exploit the audience by preying on their susceptibilities”

Respondents generally interpreted “should not improperly exploit the audience by preying on their susceptibilities” to mean that programme makers would not be allowed to recruit or solicit donations. As previously mentioned, there was a feeling that normal critical faculties have to be set aside to truly benefit from a faith-based, witness type programme and respondents were again concerned that we could all be vulnerable at some point when engaged in this kind of programme.

“Programmes which contain claims of special powers or abilities”

The issue of how to deal with programmes that contain claims of special powers or abilities was rarely brought up spontaneously. Claims to such powers proved to be very controversial amongst respondents. Certainly they all felt that people or groups claiming special powers had to be treated very carefully in programmes. Respondents were nervous about the inclusion of such people on any programme, but most particularly religious programmes, precisely because of the ‘suspension of critical framework’ which sometimes accompanies such programmes, and which they felt was appropriate when viewing/listening to such programmes.

Differences between specific groups

Jewish respondents

This group was very similar in response to the mainstream groups, but generally were very happy with the ‘minority’ provision they had via community networks and specialist subscription channels.

Sikh respondents

This group felt their community was a close knit one, and that their religion was very tied up with their language and therefore they felt that it would be inappropriate to show Sikh worship on terrestrial television. Certainly they felt that the Sikh perspective should be heard more often in documentaries, debates and discussions.

Hindu respondents

This group spent much time arguing that religious programmes should be much more open and broad based, and that there should be a wider range of ‘voices’ heard on faith based programmes.

Muslim respondents

They shared many of the views and concerns about the state of religious broadcasting as the other groups, particularly comments relating to terrestrial programming and channels. They had one set of particular criticisms related to portrayal (i.e. as extremists) and representation.

Buddhist respondents

They felt that there was very little, if any, religious programming for their faith and that what was produced was primarily shallow and superficial in its representation of their faith. They also felt that programmes showing their faith were inadequately researched with little consultation or comment from their experts.

Respondents in Northern Ireland

Respondents felt that their particular context was somewhat different to the mainland. They argued that religion has a far more prominent role, and that this is reflected in a broader range of religious broadcasting, in Northern Ireland. This said, they still felt that religious programming was inadequate in many of the same ways that the other groups had expressed.

The **non-believers** within the sample accepted the role and need for religious programmes for both believers and non-believers. However, there was a very clear call for religious programming to be balanced by the inclusion and representation of non-religious positions.

Industry professionals

- The industry professionals' view of the current state of religious programming was very much in line with audience findings but often put in much stronger terms. However, they felt that Christian worship was dealt with well (certainly in comparison with the way it was handled in the past) and that the worship and the *Songs of Praise* audiences need to be protected.
- There was a consensus that the audience was currently poorly served by religious broadcasting on a number of fronts:
 - not being sufficiently entertaining, this was largely linked to the lack of resources and talent invested;
 - an imbalance in the representation of faiths, in terms of the range of faiths represented, and the extent and manner of that representation;
 - poor scheduling where faith and belief programmes were marginalized by being largely only present on the edges of the schedule;
 - lack of interfaith dialogue and debate, and the poor levels of research and credibility of religious programmes; and
 - present output tends not to engage with current issues and fails to reflect and understand the ordinariness and significance of faith and spirituality to the vast majority of people.
- However, there was a view that the broadcasting output was changing rapidly as broadcasters found more innovative, entertaining and relevant ways to explore religious issues and themes.

- A number of specific issues were raised by industry professionals:
 - they wished to broaden the definition of religious programming in order to encourage the production of more entertaining and appealing programmes;
 - they expressed the concern that light touch regulation could result in non-religious programmes being made under the banner of religious programmes, but which did not engage sufficiently with specifically religious issues; and
 - they were concerned about any ground being given to allow requests for donation or recruitment on any of the platforms, although they had mixed views on the acceptability of these practices on subscription or opt-in channels.

- Industry professionals, like the consumers, recognised the importance of programme information across the different forms of religious broadcasting e.g. polemic, docu drama, and that this should be applied consistently across the platforms.

- There was also some concern about the consistent application of regulation across the platforms, specifically cable, satellite and subscription channels, and whether these channels would have to play by the same rules as terrestrial channels. Industry professionals felt that if there were to be obligations for public service broadcasting to include religious broadcasting, there would need to be some support so that these channels would not be operating with unfair constraints in the digital world.

- The views of leaders of the faith communities and other belief systems on how the audience is currently served by religious broadcasting echoed much that was said by the respondents in the focus groups:
 - specifically, they remarked on the lack of balance in terms of output and the unfair portrayal for both those of faith and non-belief systems;
 - they also commented on the formulaic nature of current religious programmes, which did not connect with people's daily experience; and
 - these respondents felt that there was a real lack of recognition from broadcasters of the importance of spirituality to the broad swathe of society and that the term 'religious' in the census and other surveys did not reflect the importance of spirituality in people's everyday lives.

- Regarding donations and recruitment the religious and non-belief leaders reiterated all that had been voiced by the consumers in the focus groups.

- Religious and non-belief leaders felt that there was potential for real improvement in religious broadcasting. They anticipated a greater diversity of views, more vigorous debate and the inclusion of religious views in more mainstream programming. However, there was a concern that allowing any recruitment or donation would eventually lead to US-style tele-evangelism, a prospect that they were not comfortable with.

Section 2

Background & research objectives

Background

Having replaced the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC), the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and the Radio Authority (RA), Ofcom published a draft Broadcasting Code in summer 2004. One section of this draft code was concerned with religion and religious broadcasting and it incorporated some significant proposed changes to the previous regulation. It outlined the following principles:

- to ensure that a proper degree of responsibility is exercised by broadcasters regarding the content of religious programmes;
- to ensure that the religious views and beliefs of a religion or religious denomination are not abused; and
- to ensure that audience members are protected from improper exploitation.

In addition to the consultation process following the publication of the draft Ofcom decided that it was important to conduct some systematic research amongst broadcast audiences in order to solicit feedback on their attitudes towards the regulation of religious programming.

Research objectives

Ofcom commissioned Counterpoint Research, an independent market research agency, to conduct the study and to inform understanding around the following key areas:

- to investigate perceptions, both at a consumer and citizen level, of religious programmes on TV and radio, in its narrowest and widest forms in order to develop a definition of religious broadcasting;
- to assess the impact of the potential change in regulation of religious broadcasting and to assess the potential risk to minority/susceptible groups;
- to explore the role of, and attitudes towards, religious programmes amongst different groups, including the positive and negative elements of current output;
- to investigate perceptions of religion/religious broadcasting and its perceived value;
- to understand how religious broadcasting could be developed in the future to maximise relevance/accessibility; and
- to investigate, via the use of creative techniques, alternative formats or programme ideas that seek to broaden the appeal/relevance of religious broadcasting.

Methodology

Three stages of research were conducted: desk research; interviews with professionals; and group discussions amongst consumers.

Stage 1 – Desk research

A review of the literature was conducted to inform the discussion guide for each of the groups of interest.

Stage 2 – Group discussions

The main stage was a series of 18 two-hour group discussions with consumers.

A broad cross section of the UK population was included in the research, including the following specific groups:

- Weak, lapsed or non-believers of traditional religions;
- Christian (including denominations) believers; and
- Followers of major world faiths (referred to as *other faiths* throughout this report) as listed below:
 - Islam
 - Hinduism
 - Judaism
 - Sikhism
 - Buddhism

The following table provides a detailed breakdown of the sample:

Mixed groups of weak, lapsed & non-believers of traditional religions	Medium-Strong Christian believers	Other faiths: Medium-Strong believers
Female Pre-family Including 2 ex-Jewish Edinburgh	Male Pre-family Bristol	Muslim men 25-50, BC1C2 Birmingham
Male Pre-family Including 2 ex-Muslims Edinburgh	Female Pre-family Cardiff	Muslim women 30-55, C1C2D Leeds
Male With children Including 2 ex-Sikh Birmingham	Female With children North London	Hindu men and women 25-55, BC1C2 Camden
Female With children Including 2 ex-Buddhists London	Male With children Protestant Belfast	Sikh men and women 25-55, C1C2D Hayes
Male Empty-nesters Including 2 ex-Muslims Cardiff	Female Empty-nesters Catholic Belfast	Buddhist men and women 25-55, BC1C2 Bristol
Female Empty-nesters Including 2 ex-Hindus Newcastle	Male Empty-nesters Newcastle	Jewish men and women 30-60, C1C2D North London

Stage 3 – Interviews with professionals

20 in-depth interviews were held with representatives from the media (programme commissioners and producers) and leaders of faith communities and other belief systems. This process provided contextual depth and a framework against which the discussions and findings from the groups could be assessed.

The research fieldwork was conducted between 18 November and 16 December 2004.

This document reports on the findings of this study and represents the views of the respondents participating in stages 2 & 3 of the research.

Section 3

Current perceptions of religious programming

Definitions of 'religious programmes'

Respondents were asked what they perceived religious broadcasting to be. Across the board, religious programmes were seen as separate from programmes about people's 'real' lives. Religious programmes were identified by a number of criteria. The main determining criterion was that the programmes took place within a church setting and usually contained some representation of worship or ritual. To this extent respondents felt that there was a specific and familiar format to religious programmes e.g. containing ritual. Their consensus was that this was a clear and different kind of programme, usually identified as traditional worship programmes e.g. Sunday morning programmes showing religious services. *Songs of Praise* and the *Daily Service* on radio epitomised their understanding of what constituted a religious programme.

"If you are thinking of religious programming yourself you really do think of the Songs of Praise or lots of Ministers sitting round dealing with religious issues, rather than humour or film."
(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

To a considerable degree respondents' impressions of religious broadcasting were informed by outdated memories of religious programmes, often reaching back 10 or 20 years. Thus, there was often a lack of awareness of the specifics of current religious broadcasting output.

"It brings back memories for me of school days."
(Male, Empty Nester, Christian, Newcastle)

For some, younger respondents in particular, more modern and contemporary programmes, such as BBC's *The Heaven and Earth Show*, were also mentioned as constituting religious programmes. These were felt to provide a broader perspective than purely 'worship' programmes and were appreciated for their inclusiveness.

There was also a general awareness of specific evangelical channels. These were normally bracketed alongside tele-evangelism. These channels were nearly always associated with American style religious broadcasting, often viewed pejoratively as "preachers trying to prey on vulnerable people" and "conmen" extorting money.

Participants from the other faiths tended to share the broad understanding of what constituted terrestrial religious broadcasting. An important difference for these groups was the use of niche television channels and radio stations with a religious element e.g. Zee TV and Sunrise Radio, which they turned to in order to meet their religious and cultural programming needs. Respondents from the other faiths felt that their religion was very tied up with their language and reasoned that it was understandable that a foreign language based service would not be provided on mainstream broadcasting. These niche channels tended to be seen as portraying their culture and were often in their language.

On the whole, religious programmes were seen as different to 'mainstream' or normal programmes, being directed at those who wished to worship

"I think there is a difference between Songs of Praise and your documentaries. Someone who isn't of a Christian faith would have no interest whatsoever in watching Songs of Praise, but might watch a documentary."

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

Religious programmes were also associated with religious festivals such as Easter and Christmas, but also Diwali and Ramadan.

On reflection, respondents felt that there were other programmes outside this narrow, core definition of religious programmes that they wanted to explore in the context of religious programming. Across all groups, as the discussion developed, respondents began to consider and question whether other kinds of programmes could or should be counted as religious programmes.

"Now I am thinking if it makes you think about religion, then it's a religious programme."

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

"I suppose if it is talking about religion and culture or if it is educating or informing people about it then it's a religious programme."

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

Respondents felt that religious programmes were overwhelmingly seen to be focused on what they regarded the established Christian religion. Other faiths were seen to be served by satellite channels and as such were considered niche programming.

Current perceptions and role of religious programmes

For all respondents, apart from a minority group of Christians with strongly held belief, current religious programming attracted some serious criticism. There was a general sense that these programmes were not for them, and not reflective of their faith as they experienced it in contemporary Britain.

"I automatically switch off if someone is preaching – I don't want it rammed down my throat."

(Female, Empty Nester, Belfast)

Respondents felt that religious programmes did not engage with their everyday lives and experience. They felt that religious programmes tended to preach at them and were perceived as aloof and removed from their faith experience. This perception fed into a view that religious programmes were primarily directed at, and served the needs of, those who were older or housebound or isolated, to enable them to worship. There was, therefore, recognition that the current role of religious programming performs an important social function. However, the feeling was that these programmes were broadcast at a time where most people have very low expectations and as such were not considered to interfere with their viewing or listening.

Many felt that this sort of narrow worship-based religious programming was included in the schedule because Britain is a predominantly Christian country. There was a

strong expectation across all faiths that Christian religious broadcasting would have a dominant position in the terrestrial TV schedules.

*“Though I am Buddhist, I feel quite strongly that it is a Christian society and I think that we do have to respect that.”
(Buddhist, Bristol)*

For many, there was a sense of nostalgia about mainstream religious programmes. Respondents reported having grown up with these programmes and most didn't want to get rid of them. Although respondents felt religious programmes were not for them, they occupied a familiar place in the television landscape, and many committed Christians, and most of the followers of the other faiths tended to share this perspective.

*“Songs of Praise I would view as being quite normal, it's more mainstream, where as the satellite programmes tend to be very Americanised.”
(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)*

*“What I get out of it is the fact that it is on the air and it is still putting the message out.”
(Female, Empty Nesters, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)*

For some of the committed Christians, whilst they shared the view that religious programmes performed a service for older, housebound people they also felt that such programmes provided an interesting insight into other churches, communities and towns. There was also an appreciation of religious programmes that were offering a different format e.g. *The Heaven and Earth Show*. These were seen as trying to make religious programmes more accessible, inclusive and relevant. This group also appreciated religious programmes as reassuring and familiar but they also shared the criticisms about the quality and relevance of religious broadcasting.

*“I like the little snippets between the hymns when they tell you about the town they're in & its history. I don't like the hymns.”
(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)*

Throughout all groups, there was some reluctance to be overly critical of current religious broadcasting output because respondents felt that these programmes were not for them and therefore they were not really in a position to pass judgement.

*“There has to be a place for Songs of Praise type programmes, it may not be my cup of tea, but there are people who can't get to church.”
(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)*

The key point is that religious programmes were perceived to be very narrowly defined as Christian, portraying worship in a manner that is out of touch with 'normal people's day to day lives'. The inclusion by respondents of what they regard as a new attempt at religious broadcasting via *The Heaven and Earth Show* in this category was largely due to its slot on a Sunday morning. It was the slot that was felt to define *The Heaven and Earth Show* as religious broadcasting rather than the format.

“That's [Heaven and Earth Show] only quite interesting because it's quite diverse. They bring out more discussion so you can have an opinion and you tend to feel more part of that audience, so the likes of

Heaven and Earth when you get debate, you feel part of it. You can get more involved.”

(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)

“I don’t like these ones set in a Church with a preacher. Programmes where everyone gives their opinions are more interesting to me.

Believing is not all about just going to Church; I don’t like people just preaching at you”

(Female, Weak-no belief, Edinburgh)

When considering the nature of religious programmes there was a definite group process that occurred throughout the various focus groups. Initially respondents defined religious programmes quite narrowly. However, upon further reflection respondents started to talk about programmes which were more broadly about belief, faith, ethics and spirituality. In so doing, respondents started to question their previously expressed narrow definition of religious broadcasting.

“I think that there are programmes that cover moral issues that can be put into that [religious programming] category, I think that anything moral now is almost religion as well.”

(Female, Empty Nesters, Catholic, Belfast)

“I think the religious message is boring, we’ve heard it, we have been through the schools, we have been through the Catholic system and we’ve heard it over and over again and we don’t need to hear it anymore, we want something else to engage with it.”

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

Respondents then moved, from seeing the worship based programmes as the definitive religious programme, to considering a wider range of programmes, in a variety of different formats, that they felt might be, perhaps should be, included in the ‘faith and belief related’ category.

These programmes included documentaries about specific moral issues, programmes about religious and ethnic minorities, history programmes with a religious or belief focus (e.g. *History of Atheism*), news and current affairs programmes about world politics following the events of 11 September 2001, and specific characters and storylines in dramas.

In addition, respondents identified programmes that they considered to be aimed at all listeners or viewers, not just religious ones, e.g. *Thought for the Day* and *Pause for Thought*.

“Thought for the Day, it’s wonderful. It can come from any direction.

Lionel Blue is a brilliant broadcaster, he’s not going to turn you on to his brand of religion, but he’s just a great broadcaster, and I’m sure there’s a lot of people like that from every kind of religious background.”

(Female, Pre-family, Weak-no belief, Edinburgh)

Respondents also identified moral issue and dilemma programmes such as *The Moral Maze*, *The Choice* and *Beyond Belief*.

When starting to think about religious broadcasting in broader terms, respondents became more engaged and interested. Respondents watched, listened to and cared about these programmes but did not initially think that such programmes could be

included within the narrow definition of religious programmes. This was in part because the latter were seen to be defined as much by their scheduling slot and worship format but also because of a perception from respondents that such programmes were indeed the “official” religious broadcasting output.

The process of discussing religious programmes led respondents to ask to define religious broadcasting more broadly:

*“Michael Palin [Himalayas] was fascinating, it wasn’t offensive, it was informative. I would call it partly religious because it did go into it.”
(Male, Empty Nester, Christian, Newcastle)*

*“If you include those sorts of programmes then it’s a different question, yes I think these programmes are more important and it makes you think about what else programmes about someone’s faith should be doing.”
(Male, Sikh, Hayes)*

In summary, audiences saw current religious programming as mainly occupying the periphery of broadcasting output, in that it was mostly traditional worship or on non-terrestrial channels. They noted an absence of core religious broadcasting within mainstream broadcasting

Issues with religious programmes

During the course of the group discussions there were a number of issues that arose in connection with the current output of religious programming.

Firstly, as mentioned above, respondents wanted to define religious programming more broadly, and to move away from focussing purely upon the Christian established church. They wanted to move towards a broader definition of religious programming that would encompass more inclusive considerations of faith, belief, ethics, morality, values, spirituality, contemplation and meditation.

*“When you have TV on, every programme covers all sorts of subjects and that is how it should be.”
(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)*

*“I personally differentiate between religion and spirituality. I think the word religion conjures up the traditional religions and I would probably think ‘oh, boring’, I would be more open to watching it if it was labelled spiritual.”
(Buddhist, Bristol)*

Throughout the groups respondents felt that religious programmes currently suffered from an underlying assumption that there is nothing more to learn beyond the doctrine and/or perceived dogma of mainstream Christian faith. They clearly expressed a real desire to learn more about others’ perspectives rather than remain satisfied with the one faith. This was seen as particularly important after the events of 11 September 2001, since they felt that mainstream representations of other faiths were hard to find.

“It’s not informing anybody, not moving anyone away from normal thought processes.”

(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)

"If there were more than one faith there, I would find that interesting. Especially, if they are all getting along together."

(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)

Respondents largely characterised religious programmes as insular, tentative and uninformative. It was felt that more robust and challenging debate and discussion between and within faiths should be encouraged in religious programming. By informing and educating the audiences about different faiths, cultures, lifestyles and belief systems, and by taking a holistic viewpoint, respondents felt that religious programmes could and should help audiences to make better sense of their place in the world. The feeling was that such programmes should be more outward looking and more accurately reflect our society. By failing to accurately reflect our multi-faith and multi-cultural society as it is now, they felt that programmes are portraying a distorted representation of society. Respondents frequently talked enthusiastically about the multi-faith education their children were receiving at school and how often they felt that their children were better informed than them. They want to hear different voices on all types of programmes, as well as a broader view of what religious programmes constitute.

"I think with the amount of immigrants we have, there's probably scope for a little bit of their faith to come in, mainly so the rest of us can understand it."

(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)

There was also a sense that there was currently a politically correct motivation behind the inclusion of other faiths, but that religious programmes were not really taking their views seriously. Respondents suggested that the current religious output should seek to make debates more real.

"I watch them occasionally... a lot of the racism in this country is down to ignorance; if you can understand other people's views and faiths it will prevent this."

(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)

Other issues that arose with religious programmes focussed upon what they perceived as its bland and non-innovative output. Religious programming was judged to be safe and lacking in passion and inspiration. There was a sense that broadcasters were assuming that the audience is not interested, as evinced by its late and hidden place within the schedule.

In contrast to how they judged current religious broadcasting, respondents wanted to see the real intensity of emotion and joy that could accompany faith. They felt that more interesting, innovative, challenging, involving and accessible formats across the genres would go some way to addressing their concerns. Programmes that stretch them and take them outside of their normal point of view, that were not afraid to deal with values, ethics and 'real lives', were absent in the current output. There was a desire to see more committed, almost 'witnessing' programmes with believers sharing their faith in an honest way. Respondents wanted to take faith out of the church and into daily life, and did not want programming that lectured or tried to convert them.

Finally, respondents recognised the need to have well resourced, well promoted and better scheduled religious programming.

“You have got to understand how other people are, but if it’s rammed down your throats, I don’t think that’s right.”
(Male, Empty Nester, Christian, Newcastle)

“I can’t think of a better way of causing fear and mistrust in society than banning religious programmes..”
(Buddhist, Bristol)

“Try to get more of a reflection of modern life so we can relate to it more.”
(Male, Pre-family, Christian, Bristol)

Potential segmentation of religious programmes

Across the board, after reflection, respondents expressed an interest in ‘religious’ programmes that were broader in terms of ‘personal’ faith; not just about the Christian church, but about faith and belief in the widest sense. They felt that the programmes should not just be about ritual and worship, but contemplation, meditation, and reflection. Respondents felt programmes should educate and broaden understanding, and not be afraid to stretch and challenge the viewer or listener. Respondents expressed a preference for religious programmes to reflect how faith and belief is carried through to our values, ethics, and morality in a broader sense. In order to achieve this, they argued that religious programming would need to be better resourced.

The process of discussing current religious programmes led respondents to identify and enthuse about other potential types of religious programmes, which broadly broke down into three categories:

- worship or ‘personal witnessing’ type programmes;
- informative or issue-based documentary type programmes; and
- programmes on the ‘mainstream’ being made more reflective or representative.

Worship or ‘Personal Witnessing’ type programmes

The first of these three types of religious broadcasting has to date been called ‘worship’ but respondents wanted to create a new type of programming which they felt was better characterised as ‘personal stories or witnessing.’ Respondents wanted to see programmes that show belief in action, to see how somebody’s faith had made a difference to their lives. The closest description of this, in terms of format, mentioned by respondents, was *Video Nation*. This type of format would show people expressing their beliefs and faith without distance; it would be a personal, subjective experience, encompassing the best sense of sharing. A spiritual *Video Nation* would involve personal testimony in the sense of seeing how a person’s beliefs affect how they live their lives and interact with others, providing an insight into another person’s life. Comparisons with *Thought for the Day* and *Pause for Thought* were raised, but with a narrative from an ordinary person, rather than a religious leader

“I don’t think it matters what faith you are, everyone should have equal rights.”
(Male, Empty Nester, Christian, Newcastle)

“It’s making official religion personal”

(Hindu, Camden)

Given the personal and subjective nature of this type of programme, and the possible accompanying relaxation of critical filters from the audience watching and/or listening, respondents suggested that programme makers would need to abide by special rules. They expressed a requirement for programme makers to provide clear programme information when presenting a personal view, as witnessing and not recruiting, and to ensure that such programmes do not allow the person witnessing to denigrate others' faith or beliefs.

"You need to prevent a free for all slagging match ... have the opportunity to define your belief, but not at the expense of other religions."

(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)

Respondents welcomed the possible polemic nature of such a personal view. They knew that these views exist, that they are a part of our society and felt that it was no use pretending that people do not hold these positions and indeed that it was important to hear these views. However, there was again recognition that as a polemic these programmes would need to be subject to certain checks and balances. To this end, they felt the programmes would need to be part of a regular series that reflected and represented a variety of faith and belief positions; would need to have sufficient information to indicate which denomination is being represented; and clear information when presenting a polemic rather than a debate. Further, they took the view that the participants in the programme should be British, and again, giving this platform to an ordinary citizen, rather than a religious leader, should support the inclusive nature of the programme. This would also serve to make the programme more accessible.

"I think it is important to see British Muslims. I'd like to see them with British accents, how often do you see that?"

(Male, Muslim, Birmingham)

In summary, respondents would like programmes that show both the big events and tiny observations of a person's beliefs in action, whether that of an atheist, Hindu, Sikh, Pagan or born-again Christian. To see and hear about the actual lived experience of one person's faith and belief, they felt, is to more accurately reflect the true nature of faith and belief. Worship, the believers in particular felt, was something very personal and 'in person', and not quite suitable for television broadcast. Sharing the role and implications of beliefs or faiths in daily life was much more suited to broadcast.

"The more you find out, the less intolerant you become – if everyone gets their time slots, and if there's a foreword to it, you can listen to what they have got to say. Religions exist and are all different from one another, I have got to be in a position to say, well if that's your faith, that's your faith."

(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)

"There's a lot of people who are changing from the Christian faith to other faiths, so I think if that sort of thing was on the screens more, it would give people a more broad and settled understanding of other faiths."

(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)

“Nothing is going to be served by hiding it away, this stuff goes on in society anyway, we have got to learn to be accepting”.
(Buddhist, Bristol)

“There are some pretty weird views out there, so let’s hear them, as long as it’s reasonably respectful and not inciting, let’s have it.”
(Buddhist, Bristol)

Informative or issue based documentaries and debate

The second type of religious broadcasting that was requested was for programmes that were perceived to be either educational or issue based documentaries and debates. Across all groups there was a real and spontaneously expressed concern that we should have more of these kinds of programmes throughout all of the schedules.

“It is not varied enough, it should be on at all sorts of times, different days and there are not enough varieties of religions. It should give people the opportunity to learn about other religions.”
(Buddhist, Bristol)

Enthusiasm for such programmes derived from respondents having an appreciation of the holistic view of the relevance of religion, faith and belief to explaining and understanding our, and others’, place in the world. This was based on the perception amongst respondents that religion and belief influences and shapes both our material and conceptual world, it is a thread that runs through our politics, culture, history, ethics and values, education and language. Respondents felt that gaining an insight into another’s religion or beliefs would therefore greatly enhance their understanding of other people’s culture, history, values, etc.

“I’d love to see a programme made about Buddhism, but I would like to see more debate between faith, as a Question Time type thing, I’m not sure all programming can be representational, I don’t think that works, but the public has to get what they want.”
(Buddhist, Bristol)

In terms of issue based documentaries and debates, respondents expressed a desire to see topical and/or moral issues discussed and presented from a variety of religious perspectives, not simply that of the established Christian church. Some respondents suggested the ‘Question Time’ format with representatives from different faith and belief perspectives. It was felt that such a format, rather than giving a platform for one faith or belief perspective, would provide the opportunity to question positions taken and to unpick arguments. Respondents anticipated such debates becoming heated and welcomed this, providing a level of respect was maintained.

Respondents also talked enthusiastically about the recent programme on premature babies (*Edge of Life*). Indeed, there was widespread support across the groups for documentaries which would examine from the different faith and belief positions, topical, political and moral issues such as abortion, euthanasia, war and terrorism.

Again, the enthusiasm for such programming reflected the desire from respondents to show the relevance of faith and beliefs to their everyday lives, and particularly, in the important decisions that they and others make in their lives.

"I personally like to see them when they are being informative, I don't like it when they're over-zealous about religion. Like the evangelical thing."

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

"What You Believe is actually very challenging. People get a lot of information out of it. It is thought provoking and covers a broad range of issues and looks at how people apply religion to their life. I don't think there are too many programmes that will give you that."

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

In addition, respondents saw a role for more documentary style programmes that showed aspects of their lives that are shared across the faiths but which are played out differently e.g. weddings, funerals. There was a real interest and curiosity in seeing or hearing how other people experience such religious rituals and/or significant events.

"There was a programme recently where a Christian group had come to Belfast promoting teenagers keeping their virginity. The interesting thing was that we watched the first half and it seemed great, but luckily the documentary gave both sides and went behind the scenes, behind the religion. I have to say that I was agreeing with what they were promoting, but then the reality was different and the documentary went into that and the programme was very informative. Had you not seen the documentary, you might have been convinced by what they put forward."

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

Groups also expressed a desire to broaden the range of people that talk and represent the different faith or belief perspectives. Therefore a documentary series about marriage, or a discussion programme, would not only seek the opinions of religious leaders, the official representatives of a faith perspective, but also the layperson's viewpoint.

"Well it might make us appreciate other peoples' religion and show them respect in their beliefs and vice versa. it could become a very positive thing then, because I don't know much about other religions. It should be definitely for everybody."

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

"I think that we need to be able to make space for everybody and everybody should be included, and I do feel that everyone should be included, but if a country is predominantly Christian, or Muslim, or Hindu, whatever, they should go with that flow... but still be tolerant and have respect for everybody else."

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

Respondents also expressed a need for documentaries that would cover a wide panoply of interests. Subjects suggested included the influence of religion on architecture and music, an exploration of significant historical dates and festivals of a religion e.g. the anniversary of Amritsar, and the exploration of religious practices. All groups felt that this would promote awareness of others' faiths and beliefs and spoke enthusiastically of documentaries that had achieved this e.g. *Jewish Law*, *A Brief History of Atheism*, and *Don't Marry White*.

Participants also argued that this category of 'informative' programming could include more historical programmes. They felt that exploring history from a religious, faith or belief system point of view might help answer interesting and pertinent questions such as 'why does religion appear to be so central to many conflicts in the world through history?' This was something that they argued was especially relevant after the events of 11 September 2001. There was a spontaneous desire for programmes of this type to begin to engage with what they felt was such an enormous issue. They hoped this type of programming would be mainstream, good quality, accessible and, ideally, produced very soon.

Throughout the groups there was a general and genuine interest in such programmes and felt they should be promoted and scheduled as more mainstream material and not as "religious broadcasting." They felt that this is something that all platforms and channels should be doing. With regards to informative religious programmes, respondents felt it was essential that checks and balances were present. It was argued that this genre was capable of having this objectivity and fairness built in. To achieve this, programmes would need to be well researched with a commitment to reflecting the broad consensus of that faith and pointing out any 'minority views'. Informative of issue based programmes should at least consult with or be checked by leaders from appropriate faiths/beliefs, and ideally they would be involved in the making of them. As ever, they must not put down or denigrate others' faith or beliefs.

*"There's a certain amount of time given to religion so there should be space for documentaries which challenge the religions that we see."
(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)*

*"I think it's ok to question somebody else's faith when there's somebody of that faith there, but if somebody's having a poke at another religion, they are not an expert on that religion, so that's not right."
(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)*

There was considerable feeling that this category of programming was not made often enough, with enough resources or well enough, by any of the channels. The BBC was felt to do more of this than the other channels, which was deemed to be appropriate. Respondents felt that documentary-style material would help make a better society and help us understand each other better. They considered that the introduction of faith and belief into everyday documentary and discussion formats would begin to make faith more relevant and be realistically accepting that moral judgements are not made in isolation.

Making non-religious broadcasting more reflective/realistic

There was a feeling that outside of 'religious broadcasting' there was far too little real reflection of how many people have a faith, and how much faith plays a part in their lives and everyday decision-making.

Many respondents felt that genres, such as soaps, dramas and other mainstream programming portrayed an untrue version of reality. These respondents felt that such programmes tended to stereotype and caricature people with beliefs, or portrayed them in a negative way. Both Muslims and other groups felt that Muslims suffered most from negative representation. They also noticed that British society tended to be equated with secularism or atheism and asked where the 'day to day' aspects of religious life were shown. They felt that there was more scope for faith-based stories in mainstream programmes, so long as they were not stereotyping or caricaturing.

“Religion is a big thing, like sex or politics, it should feature in most programmes, but that won’t make them religious.”
(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)

“They’re just trying to bring it into everyday life. It’s about the character and every day life [but] you never really see a positive religious role model in a soap.”
(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

Finally there was some discussion of how ‘moral tales’, even religious scripture, could be dramatised in a contemporary setting, particularly for children where television was seen as a particularly effective way of harnessing interest and communicating ideas. Good examples were thought to include the *Mahabharata*, *Teletubbies* and *The Fimbles* celebrating Diwali, and the animation of the Bible stories.

Specific questions

The following section summarises the answers given by the respondents to specific questions which formed part of the key objectives of the study.

Is the audience interested in religion/religious broadcasting?

Within the narrow definition of religious broadcasting initially defined by the respondents there was clearly little interest in religious broadcasting. However, within their broader definition of what could be considered religious programming, there was keen interest. As citizens, all respondents felt that it was important that programmes within the broader definition of religious programmes should be provided.

As individual consumers of television, most, including the non-believers, felt that they would be very interested in watching all three categories of religious programmes. However, they felt that programmes that fell into the first category of ‘worship’ or ‘personal witnessing’ would probably be of least immediate interest.

Who should provide religious programmes?

Within the narrow definition of religious broadcasting, the BBC was deemed to be probably the only broadcaster who should provide religious programmes. The reasoning was that it would be unfair to force commercial television and radio broadcasters, operating with more commercial pressures, to provide religious programmes. However, when considering the wider definition of religious programmes respondents felt that all channels/stations should and would probably want to make them. Certainly the BBC channels (One, Two, Three and Four as well as BBC Radio) would be the most accessible, especially given their track record of highly regarded programmes such as *Thought For The Day* and *Pause For Thought*. In addition it was anticipated that those non-terrestrial channels which also have a track record at making quality, engaging programmes, specifically channels like Discovery, would be appropriate, as would the religious and minority channels. Finally, the commercial terrestrial channels, which have a good reputation for making entertaining programmes, would also be possible providers.

What role does religious broadcasting have, and are they satisfied with the current output?

When viewed within the narrow definition of worship, religious programmes play a very small role for the majority of respondents. However, after reflecting on the issues, most changed their mind and argued that religious programming was important to them if taken to include the wider definition. Respondents argued that they are currently poorly served and that they would have an appetite to watch a range of religious programmes, using their broader definition, and that these programmes should be included within the programming schedule.

Do audiences want to be 'improved' by such programming?

Participants argued that they want to see faith, religious practices, spirituality and people's experiences and ways of life from new perspectives. The broader definition of religious programming could be challenging, giving them an opportunity to reconsider things and also to stretch themselves. Respondents reported wanting to learn something about history, culture and society and explore these in the context of ethics, morals and values. There was a clear desire to find programming that was both religious and explicitly informative, programming which would leave them with a sense of having changed, improved and learned something fairly fundamental.

What do audiences think of the current output?

Programmes such as *Songs of Praise* were largely perceived to be low quality, although to a considerable degree respondents' impressions of religious broadcasting were based on past rather than recent experience of the genre, but from the respondents' point of view these were not particularly worth improving. Most of these respondents were uninterested in watching strictly worship programmes, of any quality.

Other programmes were judged by the standards of news, current affairs and documentaries, and were found to be good quality, although they were not actually perceived as religious broadcasting within the narrow definition. However, respondents felt the quality of religious broadcasting programmes (in its most inclusive definition) could be improved, and most say they would engage in at least some of the programmes.

Do audiences see religious broadcasting as having a social use?

As religious broadcasting is currently defined, its social use was its main, if not only, function. However, respondents argued that religious broadcasting could be so much more important and improving at a much higher level.

Should religious broadcasting be discrete/niche or integral to broader interest programmes?

Within the current narrow definition of religious broadcasting respondents felt that it should remain niche so that the majority of the audience would know where it is and therefore could easily avoid it. However, again within the broader definition, they felt that Ofcom could and should be actively challenging programme makers to provide better programmes across the three broad areas outlined earlier.

Firstly, respondents argued that there is space for contemplative, meditative, witnessing and “personal” programmes, for which relevant programme information should be provided to ensure audiences are aware the content may be polemic. Secondly, respondents clearly expressed a desire for the broader, discussion, documentary style programmes which explore faith and ethics and values-related topics. Thirdly, there should also be the important category of wider mainstream programmes, which should reflect our current society, and the role of faith, or the lack of it, in characters’ lives, e.g. religious storylines in soaps or popular dramas. Thus, respondents argued that religious broadcasting should be both discrete from and integral to broader interest programmes.

Should religious broadcasting be protected by regulation?

In its current form, it was felt that religious broadcasting should be protected by regulation, especially as it provides a service to the housebound. The rationale was that because religious broadcasting has been so poor, and with regard to television output the viewing figures low, there was therefore some need for protection. However, if the definition of religious broadcasting is widened and this broader range of programmes was made, then respondents expected audiences to tune into these programmes in higher numbers. .

How can religious broadcasting be developed in the future?

Respondents felt that religious broadcasting should take advantage of the new formats which have been developed in relation to all other types of programmes. Thus it was argued that there could well be religious programmes such as, “*Faith Swap*” (like *Wife Swap* but with people from different faiths), “*A day in the life of ...*”, *Jamie’s Kitchen* (e.g. novices in a seminary) and *Video Nation*.

At one level programmes such as *Goodness Gracious Me*, *The Kumars at No. 42*, *The Vicar of Dibley*, *Father Ted* and many Jewish comedies were cited as also being ways they learned more about faiths and their related lifestyles and values.

How does the audience feel about different belief systems (including Scientology, Paganism, Voodoo, Satanism, Humanism, and Secularism)?

The discussions across the groups flowed from a conviction that they needed to experience and learn more about other faith and belief systems, about alternative ways of expressing faith, and about people who have faith or belief. At this level, respondents argued that everyone should have the right to express their belief or non-belief. Therefore, every type of faith or belief system should be able to be at least the subject of discussion in documentary type programmes (where the checks and balances are internal to the programme). However, having rationalised themselves into this position there was clear discomfort with the ‘giving’ of air time to some of these belief systems.

Their main reason for discomfort within the groups sprung from a strong personal disapproval of them, in particular, Scientology, Voodoo and Satanism. There was also a strong sense that these three belief systems should be scheduled carefully to ensure that programmes avoided exposing the vulnerable to them. Respondents were also much more nervous of these belief systems being covered in the ‘witnessing’, “personal” type programmes, where they felt there was more potential for polemic or one-sided arguments being put forward.

However, the consensus was that there were no good arguments against the inclusion of Satanism, Voodoo or Scientology in programmes, so long as audiences were given sufficient information and programmes were appropriately scheduled.

Within their broader definition of 'faith or belief-based' programmes, almost all felt it was appropriate to explore atheism, humanism, secularism etc.

How do audiences feel about programmes which address matters which concern everyone?

The general feeling was that there were far too few programmes that seriously covered issues such as life, death, sickness, tragedy, and morality- and of those that do cover these issues, many do so poorly. Within the broader definition of faith or belief-based programmes there was a spontaneously identified role for this kind of programming the respondents generally felt that it was very appropriate that the 'new religious broadcasting' address those issues on behalf of everyone.

The two main ideas put forward for appropriate formats for addressing these issues were debate programmes, with a variety of faiths represented, and documentaries showing how the various faiths handle rites of passage, e.g. transition into adolescence, leaving home, marriage, childbirth, welcoming a child into the faith, divorce, terminal illness, death, burial.

Section 4

Programme Code review

General attitudes to regulation

When thinking about regulatory issues, participants felt that religious or faith-based programmes were quite different from mainstream programmes on a number of levels. They therefore felt it was only right that separate rules should apply to such programmes.

"I think there have got to be guidelines, because people would get away with too much."

(Male, Empty Nester, Christian, Newcastle)

"I think they need to regulate it differently; if you want to discuss religion, you have to show the whole picture and cannot leave things out."

(Buddhist, Bristol)

One important difference about religious programmes, consistently given throughout the groups was that audiences were often more 'open' when watching/listening such programmes and therefore needed to be protected from programme makers abusing this more sensitive state. Respondents felt that when watching/listening to religion or faith based programmes they were often more likely to be in a different mindset and to suspend their critical disbelief.

"They have to take responsibility because they are influencing people."

(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)

"I feel they have to be as responsible as everyone else. Religion is a very delicate subject and it's got to be scrutinised by somebody. You can really affect people with religion."

(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)

There was consensus that religion is still regarded as one of the three great taboos and that people (albeit usually described as "other people") could be very sensitive when discussing religious affairs and this needed to be acknowledged by programme makers.

In terms of exploitation the participants were aware and anxious about the potential misuse of religious programmes by what they called 'con-men'. There was a strong sense amongst respondents that television in particular is a powerful medium and when viewed in the context of religious and faith based programmes it would be very important that the access of such people would need to be restricted.

"I don't feel I would be taken in by these programmes that are seeking to recruit, but some people are susceptible."

(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)

Having discussed in detail the fact that audiences were more 'open' when engaging in religious programming they felt particular groups would be more vulnerable to

being manipulated, particularly as the respondents viewed potential 'con-men' as usually very articulate.

"Some people might be caught in a difficult moment and might therefore be very vulnerable."

(Male, Empty Nester, Christian, Newcastle)

"It's hard for them to tell exactly who the audience is. There are gullible people for whom it should be labelled."

(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)

Respondents felt children and the elderly were vulnerable groups. Importantly, in the context of religious programming participants felt the term 'vulnerable' could apply to a much wider audience such as those who may be depressed or 'down'. Respondents were honest in saying that given the stresses of life (work, finances, etc) they too could be 'down' at some point in their lives and therefore could be vulnerable. Thus, respondents argued that regulation was required to protect these vulnerable people.

"I know that I definitely wouldn't want that broadcast to my children ... I might even be caught at a weak moment, we all have life-changing situations and things like that, I think that's where it should be regulated."

(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

Throughout the discussions of what religious broadcasting is, and more importantly, what it should be, respondents spontaneously identified a series of rules and regulations which they felt programmes makers should observe when making such programmes.

"They can't threaten you, brainwash you, they can't scare you, they can't ask for money, manipulate, incite riot or hatred, break the law."

(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)

The audience argued that programmes should never put down, be disrespectful or dismissive of others' beliefs and thus most programmes were expected to be serious. However, some felt that it was also important that programmes should occasionally include a lighter look at various faiths, cultures, values, morals and ethical approaches. The consensus was that while such programmes may be tongue in cheek, they would need to be mindful of others' feelings about their own faith, beliefs or religion. Crucially such programmes should certainly never be serious about their own faith, whilst being less so about alternative faiths. Where comedic approaches were adopted respondents argued that there should be clear programme information to this effect and therefore taking the programme outside the genre of 'religious broadcasting'.

Participants felt that religious and faith-based programmes should always be both 'reasonable' and 'fair'. To this end participants stated that programmes should, as far as possible, be well researched and reliable in their portrayal of a faith.

"I think offence comes from sweeping statements which are a product of ignorance."

(Buddhist, Bristol)

If a programme was going to be explicitly and solely the portrayal of one faith (such as 'witnessing' programmes), then sufficient programme information should be provided so that people could choose to watch it with an appropriate level of openness or with their critical framework in place.

Respondents also felt that faith-based programmes and religious broadcasting should present their own beliefs, culture and values without presenting them as being better than other faiths or beliefs. They also felt that it is important that programme makers or participants in programmes should not be allowed to use programmes (on either radio or television) to 'preach at' or try to get members of the audience to join their faith. This was a strong theme which underpinned most of the spontaneous discussion of faith-based or religious programmes.

*"I don't want to see hard sell, I want them to say their point of view but I do not want to see that one is better than the other."
(Buddhist, Bristol)*

Respondents were realistic about the difficulties that programme makers faced when trying to abide by regulations and they reiterated again and again how important it was to appreciate a number of factors. Firstly, they recognised that no programme could ever be 'pure' or completely 'right' or 'wrong' and that there would therefore always be grades of interpretation and competing interpretations. Further, they accepted that it was inevitable that compromises and slight distortions would appear in these programmes.

*"Its difficult isn't it ... there's us sat here now and I bet not one of us has got the exact same thoughts, the same beliefs, how do you please everybody?"
(Female, Pre-family, Christian, Cardiff)*

Respondents were also keenly aware of how religion, faith, morality and ethics etc., were all extremely sensitive subjects as well as being deeply personal, individual decisions and that therefore it would be inevitable that some people's feelings would run high. However, they argued that this was something to be expected and that programme makers should not shy away from such a response.

*"I think you have to have outspoken people, if you didn't then we would never know about some things."
(Male, Empty Nester, Christian, Newcastle)*

Respondents argued that there would always be someone who watched a programme and who would find something offensive and that this was an inevitable consequence of engaging in religious broadcasting. However, respondents insisted that people 'taking' offence was different to either allowing a programme maker to actively try to offend others (particularly where negative comments are aimed at a particular faith or belief system) or causing offence because of either poor research or an unfair portrayal of a faith.

It was felt by the respondents that if programme makers followed these guidelines, with the right attitude and the proper commitment to research and fairness, and if sufficient programme information was given (particularly where it was a 'witness' or polemic programme), then generally those who were offended had "decided" to "take" offence and that they should therefore be given little credence.

Perceptions of channels and platforms

When discussing broadcasting regulation on television, respondents tended to develop a tri-part categorisation of broadcasting platforms. The main platform for discussion and regulatory concern was terrestrial or mainstream television and within this category the BBC had a particular role. Non-terrestrial channels that are part of a package were deemed a second category. Thirdly, specific non-terrestrial channels that have to be individually subscribed to were categorised separately. This last category consisted of mixed genre channels such as Zee TV which are not 'religious channels' but provide such programming for their audiences.

*"Everything should get airtime if it is creative and of a good quality."
(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)*

*"There should be a place for religious programmes outside of ratings, definitely. It is an important part of who we are."
(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)*

*"I don't think TV is just for entertainment and I'm sure with so many channels there is enough room for programmes on religion, not the strict side of it, but everyday documentary style programmes. I think it is a public service."
(Buddhist, Bristol)*

At one level, respondents felt that the rules or regulations that they had outlined themselves should apply to all channels and programmes, whatever their type. The language of 'choice' and consumer as regulatory determining factors did not emerge spontaneously when talking about religious programmes.

*"I think it has to be everywhere. I don't know why subscription TV should be different."
(Female, Empty Nester, Weak-no belief, Newcastle)*

The important issue here was that any member of the audience could be vulnerable at any point and at a moment which was not the point at which they had made the decision to subscribe to any programme or channel package. Therefore, all of the protection provided by regulation should be available all of the time, regardless of channel.

Secondly, respondents felt that their suggested rules were simply responsible and sensible, and that it was difficult to imagine broadcasters and programme makers not wanting to abide by those rules.

Terrestrial/mainstream television & Radio

Within this category of television the BBC was felt to have a particular role for these respondents. They expected higher production values and programme quality from the BBC, even in relation to religious broadcasting in its narrowest definition. As a public service broadcaster, they also felt that the BBC should be able to make a good range of the types of programmes they had identified as possible religious broadcasting output.

They anticipated that the BBC would have an ongoing commitment to provide religious broadcasting. This was especially the case for BBC One, where they also wanted to see religious broadcasting extended to the range of programmes that they

had identified, especially since BBC One was seen both as public service broadcasting and as accessible.

However, respondents also felt that there was an important role for other broadcasters within terrestrial, mainstream television. They argued that ITV produced great entertainment, and should bring those skills to the kinds of programmes they had identified. Channel 4 was considered extremely credible when dealing with minority ethnic groups, and therefore could also be an excellent source for debate and documentary programmes about religious minorities and their cultures, lifestyles, and values etc. Some respondents thought that some channels could look at subjects such as sex and religion.

In regulatory terms radio was generally considered in a very similar way to terrestrial television. That is, BBC radio (particularly 2, 3 and 4, which were felt to have a more explicit public service broadcasting role, as well as higher quality expectations) was expected to be able to broaden its religious broadcasting output. BBC radio was also compared with commercial stations, although again respondents felt that there was no reason commercial radio stations could not produce good, stimulating and popular programmes within this genre. In terms of regulation, all of the rules that applied to terrestrial television were expected to apply to all of the channels, all of the time.

Non-terrestrial television channels (non-subscription)

Those respondents who were satellite or cable subscribers tended to report having come across tele-evangelism and religious channels as part of their overall package.

If these respondents encountered, by chance, a channel they felt had inappropriate content, such as tele-evangelists trying to preach at their audience or attempting to get them to join that denomination, then they reported simply switching over to another channel. However, everyone felt that because such channels were accessible to any subscriber at any time, whether young, old, lonely, depressed etc., then the same set of rules should apply to such channels.

*“The ones that tend to be on satellite can very pushy I think.”
(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)*

When discussing multi-channel packages, expectations around programme quality was generally lower. However, when respondents started to consider the possibility of channels like Discovery making more religious, faith or belief oriented programmes they tended to warm to the idea, given the quality of their other documentary programmes.

Ethnic minority respondents talked about ‘their’ channels in the context of satellite or cable channels that came as part of a package. They tended to argue that their religion was very tied up with their language, and that therefore much of their religious programming would have to come via the non-terrestrial channels, reasoning that it would be unfair to demand airtime for a foreign-language based service on terrestrial channels.

Other faith groups also argued that Britain was predominantly a Christian society, and that as such it was acceptable and natural that most of the current “narrow definition” religious broadcasting would be Christian focused. They also felt that it would be productive, and reasonable to expect, the evolved, wider definition faith-based programmes to have a good representation of other faiths and belief systems. Therefore there would be a chance for these to be presented on mainstream

television and radio. However, it was important to them that their community was given the chance to produce and broadcast specialist channels or programmes that would meet their more particular needs.

Radio targeted at minority groups was considered and judged in a similar way to non-terrestrial channels.

Across the board, most respondents felt that there was an opportunity for most of the terrestrial and non-terrestrial channels to produce and broadcast a range of the more widely defined faith-based programmes,

Therefore it is unsurprising that most respondents expected all of the rules for the production and broadcast of those programmes to apply to all of the channels all of the time.

Non-terrestrial television channels (individually subscribed to)

As previously mentioned, at one level, respondents resisted having a different set of rules for a given channel, based on the reasoning that the potential vulnerability of the audience cannot be judged at the point of purchase alone, and given their clear hope for responsible broadcasting in this context.

It was, however, in the context of specific channels where individuals made the choice to subscribe, that many respondents tended to use the language of consumer choice. At this level there was some discomfort at insisting on the application of the same level of regulation to channels which have been designed for a particular interest, and which subscribers have to actively opt in to and pay for.

*“I’m going on like my gran, I don’t mean to be so conservative, I’m not conservative, I’m just really, really uncomfortable with the idea of them trying to convert people to their cause so to speak, even if it’s a channel someone’s wanted so much they’ll pay extra just for that channel.”
(Female, Pre-family, Weak non belief, Edinburgh)*

*“I think it might be alright to allow a slightly different set of rules for those channels, although I’m not happy about that ... I can’t really tell you why I’m so unhappy about it.”
(Female, Children at home, Christian, North London)*

*“Yes, because people are subscribing to those, they know enough about it, they’re choosing to find out more by subscribing.”
(Female, Muslim, Leeds)*

Programme information

The role of programme information was confusing for respondents and to some extent they were almost contradictory about it. In the context of ‘witnessing’ type programmes respondents felt it was proper, necessary and generally a good idea for programme information to be provided, since there was no balancing voice within the programme. However, respondents were also nervous about the potential for broadcasters to abuse the use of programme information by using it as a justification for getting away with less responsible programme making. Another issue of concern was that programme information signifying more challenging content could be picked up by those who were vulnerable.

Therefore, respondents felt that programme information should also be regulated to some degree. Principally, the feeling was that it should be kept fairly low key and low tech. The purpose of programme information should mainly be limited to identifying programmes for people as opposed to stirring up controversy. However, in those circumstances where in-programme balance was really not possible respondents argued that information should definitely be provided e.g. for polemics.

*“I’d like to know what I was watching, I think it’s responsible to tell people what they are watching.”
(Male, Children at Home, Protestant, Belfast)*

*“It’s not good thinking it’s going to be about one religion and it turning out to be about another.”
(Male, Empty Nester, Christian, Newcastle)*

*“I think it depends, I think you can go either way, because programmes may be able to get away with a lot of things because it has been labelled that way. Or, it could be labelled in a way that people are unsure what they are getting and will go and watch it anyway, it’s about people’s perception.”
(Female, Empty Nester, Catholic, Belfast)*

Reactions to the draft Code

The draft code was introduced half way through the group sessions, and by this point most groups had already spontaneously identified much of the following as being important. When matched against the Code these reactions break down as follows:

“Responsibility” - 4.1 of the draft code

Throughout all the groups respondents felt that programme makers and broadcasters should treat belief, faith and spirituality with seriousness and respect, unless the programme was specifically described as ‘light-hearted’ or a ‘comedy’.

They stated that individuals’ ‘voices’ should be properly heard and not overly edited, cut short or subject to too much expert confrontation. Within a discussion or debate type programme they expected contrasting and opposing views to be aired. Where balance wasn’t provided within the programme there should be sufficient programme information to this effect. If the programme was a polemic then respondents felt that balance (which was important to them) should be provided by including other perspectives in a series.

*“Nothing biased, not just talking about one religion.”
(Female, Muslim, Leeds)*

“Views and beliefs must not be abused” - 4.2 of the draft code

In the context of views and beliefs, respondents expressed the need for programme makers and broadcasters to conduct proper research, and to ensure that participants, commentators or ‘voices’ within a programme would do the same. By doing this respondents felt that any representation of faiths or beliefs could therefore be defended as a ‘reasonable’ and ‘fair’ portrayal of those views, (albeit there will be a range of views within any ‘system’, or community).

They anticipated that the forum in which this should be done should allow each person to be given the chance to air their views, and to politely and reasonably state why they think their view is the right one, without being disrespectful to the other's belief system or community. They felt that everyone who participates in a faith or belief-based programme should be willing to participate on that basis and that polemics which allow freedom of speech should be subject to the conditions outlined above.

"You should not be allowed to slander any other religion, that's how you'd follow it, not to bad mouth anybody else's beliefs, by doing that you are only saying what you believe, not what you think about other beliefs."

(Female, Pre-family, Christian, Cardiff)

"It shouldn't be like the Today programme, they're not politicians, they believe in something, so you should at least allow them to express their views"

(Jewish, North London)

"Due accuracy and fairness" - 4.3 of the draft code

When asked about "due accuracy and fairness" respondents thought that this should operate on a number of levels.

Where the programme is more about 'witnessing', respondents felt that fairness and accuracy would be reliant upon the testimony, story or storyteller and thus not directly the responsibility of the broadcaster. Respondents understood that this was not a traditional form of programme, but one that they felt was important and interesting, and valid programming for today.

In contrast, where the programme was an educational or informative documentary or discussion, respondents felt that the 'normal' rules of objectivity and fairness should apply, particularly given that belief was recognised as such a sensitive topic.

For the third type of programme, where religious or faith-related topics were incorporated within mainstream programmes, respondents felt that there should be a requirement that storylines and characters should not be too extreme, as was sometimes the case in soaps. The reasoning behind this point was that the paucity of reasonable coverage of the role of spiritual faith in characters lives, meant that the topic needed to be introduced per se, before the 'edges' could be represented or explored. The most common examples objected to were Islamic fundamentalist plots and suicide pacts. These were deemed unreasonable even though the story might purport to be about a wing or faction of a religion that actually existed.

"In the soaps as well, they've never portrayed a Muslim family correctly, in the ways that we expect to see them."

(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

"Yeah, they give the names that are clearly Islamic, like Tariq, like in Eastenders, but they don't act like an Islamic family."

(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

"They all get tarnished with the same brush – it's like white hooligans that go to football matches, that's not us is it, we don't want to be

tarnished with the same brush, I don't think that all Muslims are terrorists."

(Female, Children at Home, Weak-no belief, Leeds)

There was an understanding amongst these participants that 'due fairness and accuracy' rules, as outlined above, do apply, but rather differently in different contexts.

"A programme espousing religious views or beliefs must make the identity of the religion and/or denomination clear" - 4.4 of the draft code

The importance of providing clear information about the identity of the religion and/or denomination has already been identified by the respondents as a priority for the 'witnessing' type programmes.

For the second category of programmes (i.e. discussions and documentaries) respondents expected programme contributors to be identified, because in this context they judged it even more important to know who was putting forward a particular view, because of the potential for audiences to receive these programmes as authoritative statements.

In relation to dramas, or other mainstream programmes with religious storylines or characters, respondents felt this was unnecessary as it would be ridiculous to reveal the plot in order to fulfil this part of the Code.

"Making the purpose clear when it is to convey religious views or seek recruits" - 4.5 of the draft code

The first part of this section of the draft code, "to convey religious views or beliefs" was felt to be synonymous with "espousing" and had thus, they felt, been covered already (4.4, see above). However, the second part of this section of the Code caused absolute consternation, confusion and in the end anger. This followed directly from the strength of respondents' feelings, already repeatedly expressed, about how religious and faith-based television should be used for sharing beliefs, not setting one set of beliefs over another in terms of trying to persuade viewers and listeners to join that faith. Their understanding of the existing regulation is that this is not allowed at present. They associated this kind of behaviour with the extremes of belief, not with a legitimate, active, open-minded, tolerant faith. Hence, they tended to react violently, disbelievingly and very, very negatively to this suggestion within the Code.

During the groups respondents really struggled to believe that the seeking of recruits on television or radio might happen. There was a strong sense that this would just be so "un-British". They argued that the context of British culture and broadcasting was one characterised by tolerance, understatement and responsibility, and this was something that they appreciated and wanted to protect.

Proselytising television was considered to be part of what they intensely disliked about American religious broadcasting. Respondents expressed real concern about this perceived American influence, namely that it was "pushy", "intolerant", "unthinking", "bullying", "brain-washing television" encroaching on their schedules. Respondents argued that seeking recruits on television was wholly inappropriate since programme makers cannot actually see their audience and therefore they cannot guarantee that they will be treating them appropriately.

*“A lot of people with mental health problems do turn to religion, they’re looking for answers.”
(Female, Muslim, Leeds)*

Television was felt to be so powerful a medium that it cannot help but exploit the vulnerable, whatever the good intentions of the programme makers in relation to recruiting. In this context there were concerns about radio too.

*“I know that I definitely wouldn’t want that broadcast to my children ... I might even be caught at a weak moment, we all have life-changing situations and things like that, I think that’s where it should be regulated.”
(Female, Muslim, Leeds)*

Crucially, respondents were very concerned about how seeking recruits could be regulated, and questioned what measures Ofcom could really take to ensure that responsible proselytising was taking place.

Recruitment on television channels individually subscribed to

Whilst most of the respondents were uncomfortable with the idea of recruitment per se, and certainly in relation to terrestrial and bundled non-terrestrials channels, some changed their deeply held views when considering channels individually subscribed to. Most wanted the rules to apply across the board, even to subscription channels, since the point of viewing was never the point of purchase, and therefore the viewer may have become more vulnerable since their original decision to subscribe.

This group of respondents concluded that any attempt to ‘preach at’ the audience or argue that one religion or faith was ‘better’ than another, or directly recruit the audience was unacceptable. Moreover, they felt that such broadcasting was both unprofessional and unhelpful, and went against the whole thrust of what they wanted faith-based programmes to be. This is not to say that they did not want life-changing programming, they just did not want people to be subject to what they called “potential brain washing” or “probably emotional blackmail”.

Other respondents found it much more difficult to object to a more direct approach to the audience. Their view was that since the audience had knowingly, consciously and voluntarily opted in and presumably knew what they would be getting. However, they still were not particularly comfortable with this idea. They took their references from what they had heard about coverage of American tele-evangelism or channels such as Al Jazeera (although few had seen any specific programming), and so there were concerns. However, they questioned whether their objections were reasonable because they were reluctant for regulation to limit individuals’ choice.

*“You know what you’re tuning into, so I suppose it wouldn’t be so out of the ordinary.”
(Female, Pre-family, Christian, Cardiff)*

Across the board, respondents were comfortable with the idea of signposting, such as ‘find out more information if you’re interested’, being given at the end of a programme. Respondents considered that the effort involved in finding out about further information, and the cooling off period between the programme ending and the decision made to obtain further information, were important mitigating factors. Additionally, the fact that the potential recruit would be talked with, face to face, was also an important point for many respondents.

Asking for donations

As with recruitment, asking for donations caused great concern throughout the groups and respondents asked many questions. They felt that appeals for charity were already done well on television and asked why any community would want to raise money for themselves, rather than for a charity. There were also some queries as to why a channel would want to ask for donations for themselves when they already had funding from the licence fee in the case of the BBC, from advertising or from subscription in the case of some non-terrestrial channels.

*“It’s just about big business and money ... religions shouldn’t be about this, it’s something to be followed, God isn’t for sale.”
(Female, Muslim, Leeds)*

Respondents also felt that there were many stories of con men and were very uncertain how Ofcom could ensure that the money that was being asked for was for a legitimate cause and would be properly used – and not to exploit audiences.

*“It will irritate the hell out of everybody, if I wanted to give a donation I’d give through the church, and I think that doing it through the telly they’re wasting money and influencing the wrong people, older people who don’t have the money to give it, and they can be sucked in by cons. Religion is not about money, they’re giving out the wrong message.”
(Female, Pre-family, Christian, Cardiff)*

Television was considered to be particularly suspect given that it was seen as such a powerful medium, (e.g. Live Aid, Princess Diana’s funeral and the events of 11 September 2001.) Given what respondents had mentioned earlier about the different mindset audiences would be in when watching religious programming they felt they could be ‘ripped off’ and the idea of religious programmes being used regularly for appeals for donations was very strongly resisted.

*“Its really dodgy, they shouldn’t bring money into religious programmes.”
(Female, Pre-family, Christian, Cardiff)*

However, some felt that in the context of non-terrestrial channels subscribed to individually, there might be an argument to allow this, but again almost all disapproved of the motivation behind it.

Most respondents felt that if any religious channel was allowed to directly appeal for recruits and donations then all should be allowed. However, the idea of some of the other belief systems appealing on air was worrying to some - although they could not justify a different set of rules for different belief systems.

“Should not improperly exploit the audience by preying on their susceptibilities” – 4.6 of the draft code

Respondents generally interpreted “should not improperly exploit the audience by preying on their susceptibilities” to mean that programme makers would not be allowed to recruit or solicit donations.

As previously mentioned, there was a feeling that normal critical faculties have to be set aside to truly benefit from a faith-based, witness type programme. The

respondents argued that you have to be prepared to 'come out' of your normal frame of reference to try to understand something from another point of view. They were again concerned that we could all be vulnerable at some point when engaging in this kind of programme. In terms of those identified as 'most susceptible' respondents clearly took it to mean the lonely and elderly people who they considered the most regular consumers of religious programming; young people who are not capable of weighing up the believability of what's being claimed; and the depressed who are actively looking for something to solve their problems, quickly. Therefore, generally, respondents felt that a ban was required on appeals for recruits and donations.

Additionally, clear information around 'witness' type programmes, careful scheduling of such programmes, and objectivity, fairness and balance in discussion and documentary type programmes were thought appropriate to minimise the potential for exploitation.

“Programmes which contain claims of special powers or abilities” – 4.7 of the draft code

The issue of how to deal with programmes that contain claims of special powers or abilities was rarely brought up spontaneously. Claims to such powers proved to be very controversial amongst respondents. Certainly they all felt that people or groups claiming special powers had to be treated very carefully in programmes.

Respondents were nervous about the inclusion of such people on any programme, but most particularly religious programmes, precisely because of the 'suspension of critical disbelief' which sometimes accompanies such programmes, and which they felt was appropriate when viewing/listening to such programmes.

The various groups were full of stories of fakes, failures and some very disappointed people. They wanted programme makers to try their best to assess whether the claims had any validity. Respondents certainly wanted such programmes to be screened when children were not in the audience, and whenever they were broadcast they wanted clear programme information to be provided.

“Its not right for children to see people to see people doing healing or whatever.”

(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

“For children it can come into their minds in a different way.”

(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

“It should be like with the films when they say ‘this programme may contain such and such.’”

(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

Whilst most respondents accepted that much more controversial material was available via the internet, they argued that television and radio were much more accidental in terms of potential viewing/listening, and generally quite benign when compared with the internet, therefore material such as this was more credible in this context.

Generally, most of the respondents accepted that the 'digital age' meant that considerably more material was available to more people. However, in keeping with their hope that faith-based programming would be more respectable and serious in

content, they were uncomfortable with the idea of broadcasts containing claims of special powers or abilities.

Section 5

Differences in specific groups

Jewish respondents

The Jewish respondents shared almost everything in common with the more liberal Christian and other faith groups.

They argued that Britain was a genuinely multi-faith society, but that the dominant and historical church was Christian and as such, given the limited number of hours allocated to religious broadcasting, it was not surprising that the main religious programmes would be Christian.

Many respondents reported seeing documentaries about faiths other than their own or the Christian faith, and found the whole subject of belief, culture, values etc extremely interesting. They argued that their community was very good at providing for their needs directly, and whilst more of a Jewish 'voice' in discussion programmes would be helpful, they shied away from Jewish services on mainstream television.

The Jewish respondents were slightly different than the other faith groups as they argued that a good sense of humour was crucial to life generally, and was certainly also appropriate to some of the discussions of faith and their culture. Therefore, they hoped that the serious consideration of individuals' faiths would not be confused with a complete lack of a sense of humour in relation to religion.

This group were also absolutely appalled at the idea of allowing direct appeals for recruits or donations on television and radio. They felt the whole idea of 'preaching at' the audience, putting pressure on them to consider their view 'the right one', was a dreadful potential development, and one to be resisted most vigorously.

Sikh respondents

Most of the Sikhs in the groups were 2nd, 3rd or 4th generation British Asians and many felt that as a group they had a qualitatively different life and treatment in the UK compared with their parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. This group therefore pointed to much which had changed in terms of the visibility and audibility of the Sikh point of view.

Sikhs felt their community was a close-knit one, and that their religion was very tied up with their language. They therefore felt that it would be inappropriate to show Sikh worship on terrestrial television and referred to the role of the minority channels for the provision of such output. This said, they had much to say on the role their religion played in their lives which we could all learn from, and that their voice should be more often heard in documentaries, debates and discussions.

Again, they were shocked by the proposal to allow direct appeals for recruits and donations on television or radio.

"That's why we all sit on the floor, kings and paupers, because no-one is better than another, and it's the same with religion. I might think I've

got gold and you've got stone, but as long as you follow your path devoutly, then we'll both get there"
(Sikh, Hayes)

Hindu respondents

The Hindu respondents started by talking about how narrow and unhelpful the current definition of religious broadcasting was and how important the more general notion of spirituality was. They argued that popular religious broadcasting would be more satisfying if it addressed a broader spiritual remit.

This group was keen to see a much fairer and more even set of 'voices' heard in faith-based programming. They echoed the other groups in desiring braver discussion programmes along with the witnessing, celebratory programmes that reveal the role that religion and spirituality can have in an individual's life.

Hindus, like all the other groups, were particularly appalled by the proposal to allow direct appeals, since they had spent quite some time talking about the need for programmes to be far less about consumerism and greed, and to be much more concerned with the spiritual side of life.

Muslim respondents

Muslim respondents shared many of the views and concerns about the state of religious broadcasting of the other groups, particularly comments relating to terrestrial programming and channels. However, Muslims had one set of particular criticisms related to portrayal and representation.

In terms of the nature of portrayal, this group voiced strong concerns about representational bias in programming overall, and that Muslims were chiefly portrayed as extremists of one form or another. They also remarked upon the extent of inaccuracies in the portrayal of everyday Muslim life in Britain e.g the Muslim family in *Eastenders*'. This resonated with their concern about the tangible lack of representation on British programming of their experience as British Muslims.

"Not exploiting one area of a religion, it may be a minor area of that religion, but they may exploit it to make it look more important than it is ... it's a minority of people that are very fundamentalist."
(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

Other concerns focused on balance, in terms of marginalised scheduling and again the paucity of programmes about their own and other faiths.

"They should not just push Songs of Praise and put any Islamic programme on at 12 o'clock at night or 8 o'clock in the morning."
(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

All these concerns were heightened in the context of the events of 11 September 2001, where it was felt that more accurate and balanced representation would serve a number of purposes. Within the Muslim community there was hope that more accurate and balanced representation would help to inform and educate young people about mainstream Islam and pass on religiously informed values to their young people. For the wider community, they hoped that fairer representation and balance would go some way towards educating, informing and countering ignorance

and prejudice against their community, and therefore improve social cohesion and integration.

“Not everybody knows what Islam is about, Islam is a peaceful religion, and that’s not being portrayed on the news or anywhere ... they [Religious Programmes] should go back to the roots, tell the facts, particularly because some young people are forming their own opinions, especially with the world the way it is, with the Iraq war, with the Americans, and they don’t know what Islam is actually about.”
(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

“I came to this country two years ago and I worry that my 15yr old son is losing touch with his faith, so I do make sure that whenever there is a something on about our faith that we sit down together and watch it, and we do discuss it ... we watched a programme recently about Arafat after his death.”
(Female, Muslim, Leeds)

For many, the perceived marginalisation of Islam, in terms of programming and the lack of fair, balanced and informative representation, was felt to have encouraged reliance upon non-terrestrial channels within their community.

Ideally this group would like to see, across all platforms, portrayal of British Muslims in the everyday context of British life, their religious life, and their cultural life e.g cooking, art, history, science, etc. They argued that the Muslims in these portrayals should be speaking with British accents and engaging with issues relevant to their lives in Britain.

Buddhist respondents

This group shared the views and concerns about the state of religious programming as of the other faith groups.

Chiefly they felt that there was very little, if any, religious programming for their faith and that what was produced was primarily shallow and superficial in its representation of their faith. They also felt that programmes showing their faith were inadequately researched with little consultation or comment from their experts.

There was some perception that what little religious programming they did find was felt to represent only one strand of Buddhism i.e. Friends of The Western Buddhist Order (FWBO), and that this was at the cost of the broader spectrum of Buddhist views.

Again, this group wanted to see their faith included in the mainstream of religious life in Britain.

Respondents in Northern Ireland

Respondents in this group felt that their particular context was somewhat different to the mainland. They argued that religion has a far more prominent role and that this is reflected in a broader range of religious broadcasting in Northern Ireland. This said, they still felt that religious programming was inadequate in many of the same ways that the other groups had expressed.

They expressed a desire for less antagonistic, oppositional religious programming in order to reflect what they perceived as their changing political climate. Therefore, they voiced a strong desire for more reasonable and informed interfaith dialogue.

Non- believers

Amongst non-believers there was an acceptance of the role of religious programmes to address the needs of people of faith and to inform and educate the wider community. Again, they shared the same concerns about current religious programming. However, there was a very clear call for religious programming to be balanced by the inclusion and representation of non-religious positions.

The more informed amongst these respondents felt that they were not receiving a broad portrayal of faiths, and that this was to the detriment of social cohesion and integration, particularly in relation to Islam.

Section 6

Professionals' views

Industry professionals

View on current output

The industry professionals' view of the current state of religious programming was very much in line with audience findings but often put in much stronger terms.

"It depends on where you are looking at it. On TV, it's on its knees."
(Industry Professional)

However, they felt that Christian worship was dealt with well (certainly in comparison with the way it was handled in the past) and that the worship and the *Songs of Praise* audiences need to be protected.

"In general, on dedicated channels with a public service broadcasting remit, the Christian audience are pretty well catered for. This is shown in the consistent, though relatively small, audience figures. "
(Industry Professional)

"On the BBC, the worship side of it is fantastic ... they need to make sure that they look after the Songs of Praise audience."
(Industry Professional)

There was a consensus that the audience was currently poorly served by religious broadcasting on a number of fronts. Religious programmes were primarily criticised for not being sufficiently entertaining, which they largely linked to the lack of resources and talent invested. They also argued that there was an imbalance in the representation of faiths, in terms of the range of faiths represented, and the extent and manner of that representation.

"They (BBC) seem to be wallowing in one of nostalgia, or producing programmes like the 'Son of God' series that are clearly being led by American money."
(Industry Professional)

"I find it deeply disappointing that such a talented production community cannot come up with relatable and broadly appealing religious programming, it singularly smacks of lack of adventure and imagination."
(Industry Professional)

"There are very few programmes that reflect the nature of our society, all the faiths, most focus upon Christian beliefs."
(Industry Professional)

"Catering for minority faiths is a real challenge which is not currently being met – we should cover all religions since we are a very diverse population."
(Industry Professional)

Other criticisms focused upon extremely poor scheduling where faith and belief programmes were marginalized by being largely only present on the edges of the schedule. They also commented upon the lack of interfaith dialogue and debate, and the poor levels of research and credibility of these religious programmes.

“The other thing that I am concerned about is that I need to attract talent that is thinking creatively, a safe pair of hands – its hard to do that when religion is sidelined all of the time.”

(Industry Professional)

“I have been a producer of religious programming with dead end slots and poor budgets and I think it serves no purpose.”

(Industry Professional)

“A lot of my programmes in the ‘God slot’ go out at 11.45.”

(Industry Professional)

“I tune in and I see a service – it’s the same old tired format.”

(Industry Professional)

“Religious programmes should be subject to detailed research, with and understanding of and expertise in the subject matter. They should present a proper, coherent programme with editorial balance, not just about box-ticking.”

(Industry Professional)

Finally, they were concerned that present output tended not to engage with current issues and failed to reflect and understand the ordinariness and significance of faith and spirituality to the vast majority of people.

“Religion is not something you do on a Sunday, it informs the way you live your life, and religious programming should reflect this.”

(Industry Professional)

“The big point that is being missed is the lack of understanding of the importance and normalness of religion to millions of people.”

(Industry Professional)

“It’s (current religious programmes) a bit like the disability thing – we’re fed up with people telling us about the physical disability, how you get dressed up in the morning, they’ve extracted the vital human emotions and they want disability put back into everyday life. Similarly, with religious programmes, we need to show how religion is a part of people’s everyday life.”

(Industry Professional)

“Religion is not just an adjunct to people’s lives, it’s a part of them. Religious programmes should portray this.”

(Industry Professional)

There was a view that the broadcasting output was changing rapidly as broadcasters found more innovative, entertaining and relevant ways to explore religious issues and themes.

*“There are programme makers who are now attempting to broaden the range of religious programmes to include more spiritual, moral and pastoral issues using different genres, like dramas and live debates.”
(Industry Professional)*

*“It can be a mistake to try to categorise religion and spiritual issues – they can infiltrate other genres, for example, Coronation Street, the Tonight programme, otherwise religious programmes become ghettoised. Broadcasters are starting to realise this.”
(Industry Professional)*

*“Religious programming is un-cool but in many ways it has never been more exciting.”
(Industry Professional)*

Specific issues for broadcasters

There were a number of specific issues raised by industry professionals.

Firstly, in keeping with the view of audience, they wished to broaden the definition of religious programming in order to encourage the production of more entertaining and appealing programmes.

*“We need to try to make programmes accessible to all viewers, not just those of one particular faith, to stimulate interest amongst others, to present a range of options, offer surprises that engage those who would not normally watch a very obvious, in the traditional sense, religious programme.”
(Industry Professional)*

Unsurprisingly, some argued that commercial stations without a public service broadcasting remit should not have to cover religious programmes, other than if they wished to, based upon commercial interests. However, for other industry professionals, such channels do have a duty that they do not currently fulfil, and therefore, they argued the case for heavier touch regulation.

*“Audience figures are not the be all and end all, but for a commercial channel, it’s tough, it can harm commercial objectives.”
(Industry Professional)*

*“A commercial station should not have to cover religious programmes. For channels with a PSB remit it is proper that there is a minimum requirement in terms of hours and investment.”
(Industry Professional)*

There was also a concern expressed that light touch regulation may result in non-religious programmes being made under the banner of religious programmes, for example, *Don’t Marry White*. This programme was criticised for insufficiently engaging with specifically religious issues.

Industry professionals voiced concern about any ground being given to allow requests for donation or recruitment on any of the platforms, although there were mixed views on the acceptability of these practices on subscription or opt-in channels.

*“It would be rather opening the door for something difficult to police. I’m not happy having my programmes available for people to recruit.”
(Industry Professional)*

*“Because of the nature of religions, there is not a proven or unproven, it is therefore easy to make one susceptible. Regulation should be required to ensure that the not so savvy, vulnerable viewer is not taken advantage of, whether on terrestrial or elsewhere.”
(Industry Professional)*

*“(Donations) to fund programme making is not appropriate, it sets the programme up in a different way if it is a PSB, it puts the programme editor in a quasi-commercial environment and is undermining the responsibilities of a PSB broadcaster. It is contradictory to its purpose.”
(Industry Professional)*

*“If their (subscription/opt in channels) very survival is threatened by not being able to compete on an equal footing, then it (seeking donations) seems difficult to object to.”
(Industry Professional)*

As with respondents from the focus group, industry professionals recognised the importance of programme information across the different forms of religious broadcasting e.g. polemic, docu-drama, and that this should be applied consistently across the platforms.

*“I would expect to label differently according to format, but especially if the programme is only presenting one particular standpoint or belief.”
(Industry Professional)*

*“I think that it is accepted that labelling is appropriate if the broadcaster is making a lateral show, or if tackling sensitive issues.”
(Industry Professional)*

There was also some concern about the consistent application of regulation across television platforms, specifically cable, satellite and subscription channels, and whether these channels would have to play by the same rules as terrestrial channels.

*“Non-terrestrial in particular, we need to make sure that we regulate it now, before its too late, they need to be fully regulated, subject to the same guidelines as terrestrial.”
(Industry Professional)*

Finally, industry professionals felt that if there were to be obligations for public service broadcasting to include religious broadcasting, there would need to be some support so that these channels would not be operating with unfair constraints after digital switchover.

*“If you want these kinds of programmes to be at the heart of the schedule at switchover, there will need to be sufficient financial support for this, or they’ll get relegated to the edges of the schedule.”
(Industry Professional)*

The future of religious broadcasting

Industry professionals found the future of religious broadcasting hard to determine. They suspected that it would be predominantly the BBC and Channel Four providing religious broadcasting on television, and that it would decline for those channels without a public service broadcasting remit. Alongside this they anticipated a growth in religious niche channels both on subscription and free to air channels, but this raised the question of how the plethora of channels that would be coming on-stream post-switchover would be monitored and regulated. The concern here was that deregulation may irrevocably open the doors to programming that would be very difficult to police.

“I would hope that the channels with a PSB remit would protect the number of hours devoted to religious programming.”
(Industry Professional)

“Where you have a niche genre, in the end, these will thrive. For terrestrial broadcasting channels, our obligation will decline, as there is an increase in niche programming, but we will continue to reflect key events.”
(Industry Professional)

“It’s only a matter of time, as it gets cheaper too, for these (niche/specialist) channels to take off.”
(Industry Professional)

Leaders of faith communities and other belief systems

The views of leaders of faith communities and other belief systems on how the audience is currently served by religious broadcasting closely echoed much that was said by the respondents in the focus groups. Specifically, they remarked on the lack of balance in terms of output and the unfair portrayal for both those of faith and other belief systems. Furthermore, they also commented upon the formulaic nature of current religious programmes that failed to connect with people’s daily experience.

“We have such a long way to go before the media see how important spirituality is to people.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“Many people are spiritual but they don’t like religion and it is asking the spiritual question that is important.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“We like to think of ourselves as secular with no time for religion but it is right to say that this is not true...many people do find more to these ideas than lifestyle options.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“British life de-contextualises religious practices and says instead that they are speaking to their inner spirituality.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“The audience is generally poorly served, the image they receive of religions is very narrow, the focus is often on the peripheral practices of

religion, and on conflicts, and trivialises and treats superficially non-mainstream faiths.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

“At present what is produced is crudely done, mechanistic prayer and worship programmes, where the reality of life isn’t discussed.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

These respondents felt that there was a real lack of recognition from broadcasters of the importance of spirituality to a large proportion of society and that the term ‘religious’ in the census and other surveys did not reflect the importance of spirituality in people’s everyday lives.

“All of these [religious] programmes are not speaking to the inner spirituality which is still important to those who claim not to be religious. It is not taking into account the long term changes in British Society.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

“Father Ted and Vicar of Dibley are religious, on the psychological principle that anything that us really important to you, you take the Mickey out of.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

“To have people reflect on what their own belief systems are, even if you disagree.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

Other concerns also reflected respondents’ views that religious programming too often focused upon peripheral, sensationalist and controversial aspects of religious practices.

“Channel Four has taken a broader view of Islam recently, they have broadened representation and engaged with our lack of understanding but this really is the exception.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

“I would say ‘Himalayas’ could easily have been religious programming... Michael Palin was very good, he had the attitude of I don’t believe but I am looking with interest and that is best. He had more impact because he did not believe, he was not pushing something.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

“They (religious programmes) are looking for a ‘ding dong’ in the studio rather than a considered debate. Good discussion should be like inter-faith forums, where fundamentalist positions are represented and included but not to the exclusion of all else.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

Regarding donations and recruitment, the religious and non-belief leaders reiterated all that had been voiced by the audience.

“Shades of Swaggart will haunt us if we go there.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

“Programmes should be made to inform, overt proselytising is wrong. It’s not like seeing a political broadcast, religion is much closer to us in life and values and destiny and has a potential to intimidate.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“Potentially everyone has some challenge that rocks them or their beliefs, I’d be very worried about the vulnerability of people to such appeals, regardless of whether they are watching a programme on a subscription channel.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

Finally, they argued that there was not enough emphasis upon the similarities between the faiths and their shared concerns. Instead they considered that when there was discussion it tended to be focussed upon differences and conflict between different faith and belief perspectives.

“I think you need to focus on what is common in religion and that is the spiritual.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“I want to see more discussion about what is shared ground, religious programming that looks to explore positions between faiths that are shared.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“The spiritual art is to find the level of paradox which is above contradiction.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“It does not reflect society or engage with the prejudices.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“It seems to concentrate on specific groups not a widespread spectrum, so for Islam it is concentrated on the fundamentalists aspects whilst ignoring the more liberal aspects, this is totally unrepresentative of British Islamism.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

Specific issues for leaders of faith communities and other belief systems

For leaders of the various faith/belief systems there were also a number of specific issues raised. They desired programmes that would address broader spiritual and ethical concerns. They also felt that the faith and belief perspective could provide a vast understanding that is not presently being brought to bear upon current issues. They criticised current religious broadcasting for inadequate programme research that they felt needed to be more thorough and nuanced.

“Discussion programmes tend to roll out the Bishop as though the religious hierarchy has the defining view on ethical issues, which reinforces the notion that values come purely from religion. There should be room for the ethicist and philosopher.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

“Hinduism seems to rest on the shoulders of Mark Tully.”
(Faith community/other belief system)

*“There is not sufficient nuanced engagement.”
(Faith community/other belief system)*

*“Sustainable programming will need experts; you don’t not talk to astronomers when doing astronomy programmes.”
(Faith community/other belief system)*

For this group, there were some specific concerns over religious broadcasting guidelines per se; specifically, those guidelines covering the need for broadcasters to consult with representative bodies were inadequate. This group was also unclear about the nature of any appeals process and the criteria upon which an appeal would be upheld or dismissed.

They also expressed concern over the looseness of guidelines for broadcasters to follow, and whether this would result in irresponsible broadcasting, their fear being that much of the terminology appeared to be open to interpretation.

*“The wording in the draft code is unfortunate. Parts use ‘beliefs’ as in religious beliefs, and other parts refer to ‘religious beliefs and belief systems’, it’s not consistent.”
(Faith community/other belief system)*

Some feared that the more affluent and politically influential religions would benefit most from being able to solicit money and recruit.

*“Those religions that don’t have the wealth of the Christian church are at a disadvantage, which would be exacerbated if they were allowed to recruit and ask for donations on air.”
(Faith community/other belief system)*

*“My concern is that some groups may use their dominance in this country to recruit and affect the population of other religious communities.”
(Faith community/other belief system)*

*“As an abstract issue, there is nothing wrong with it, but if you look at the context in Britain where we have a dominant Christian community and very diverse religious communities as well who do not share the former’s infrastructure, you can see the difficulty.”
(Faith community/other belief system)*

The future of religious broadcasting

Leaders of the faith/belief organisations felt that there was potential for real improvement in religious broadcasting. They anticipated a greater diversity of views, more vigorous debate and the inclusion of religious views in more mainstream programming. However, there was a concern that allowing any recruitment or donation would eventually lead to US-style tele-evangelism, a prospect that they were not comfortable with. A further concern was that commercial terrestrial channels would opt out of religious programming, though there was some expectation that more religious channels would appear, possibly on subscription or multichannel television.

“My concern about religious broadcasting on specialist channels is that they are about reinforcing people’s narrow and comfortable beliefs, and entrapping people at a low ebb, the opposite of what I would expect responsible programming to be.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

“I worry that the combination of a reduction in religious belief in society, with an increase in more fundamental or evangelist extreme positions amongst believers, we will see much more proselytising religious programming across all platforms rather than the communal, community part of religion.”

(Faith community/other belief system)

“I’m really excited about the future; I think we’ll see more imaginative religious programming, and more subscription TV channels that aren’t reliant upon importing US evangelical broadcasts.”

(Faith community/other belief system)