

Belief in a Career Report

Introduction

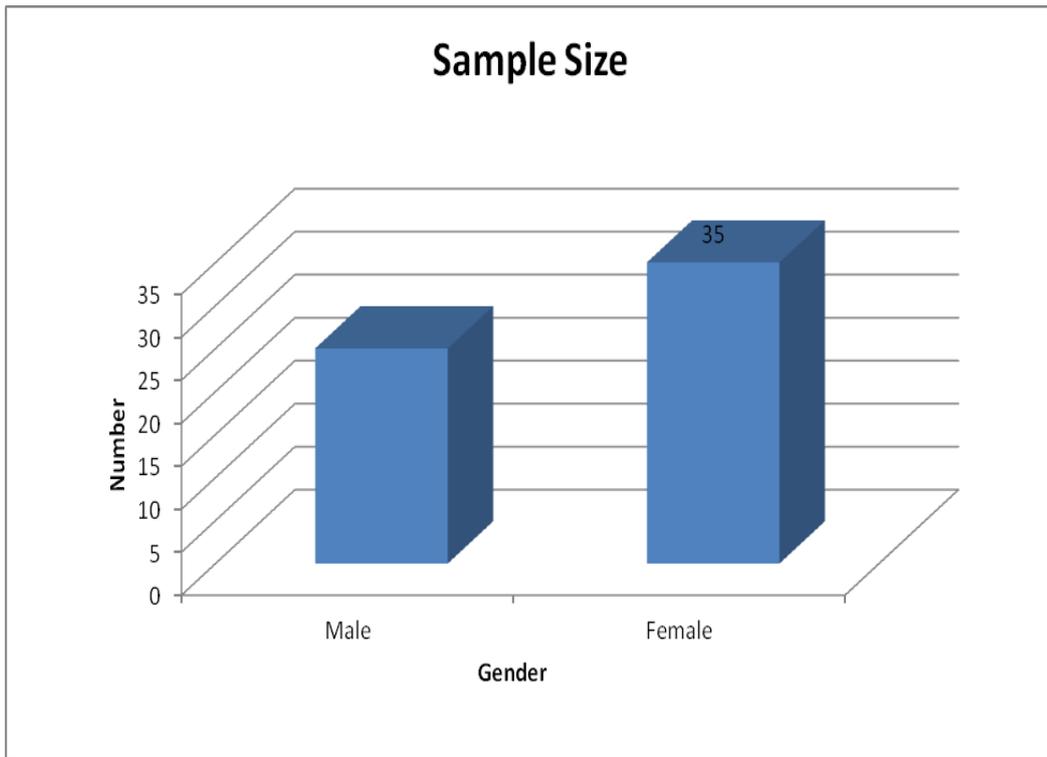
This study was produced to inform the National Careers Service on how it could improve its provision in relation to supporting customers that consider themselves either atheists or agnostics.

Over the years, with a move toward equal opportunities and diversity legislation, there has been a focus to support minorities. It is argued that the minority is often overlooked as the majority take precedence. However, the word minority in political or economic terms is usually a reference to ethnicity.

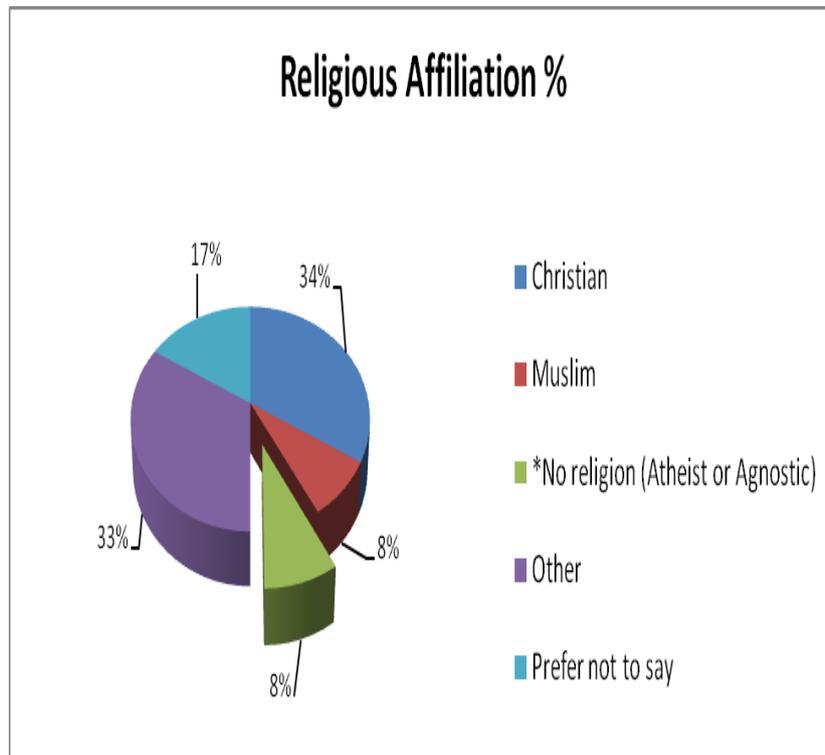
What about religion or so-called "non-belief"; with particular reference to agnostics and atheists?

A questionnaire consisting of 11 questions was given to respondents to gauge their thoughts and opinions. In the main, the respondents considered themselves as atheist or agnostic. The questionnaire was distributed manually and electronically. Some respondents were interviewed via telephone.

Quantitative Data



Total of 60 people		
Gender	Number	Percentage (%)
Male	25	41.6
Female	35	58.3

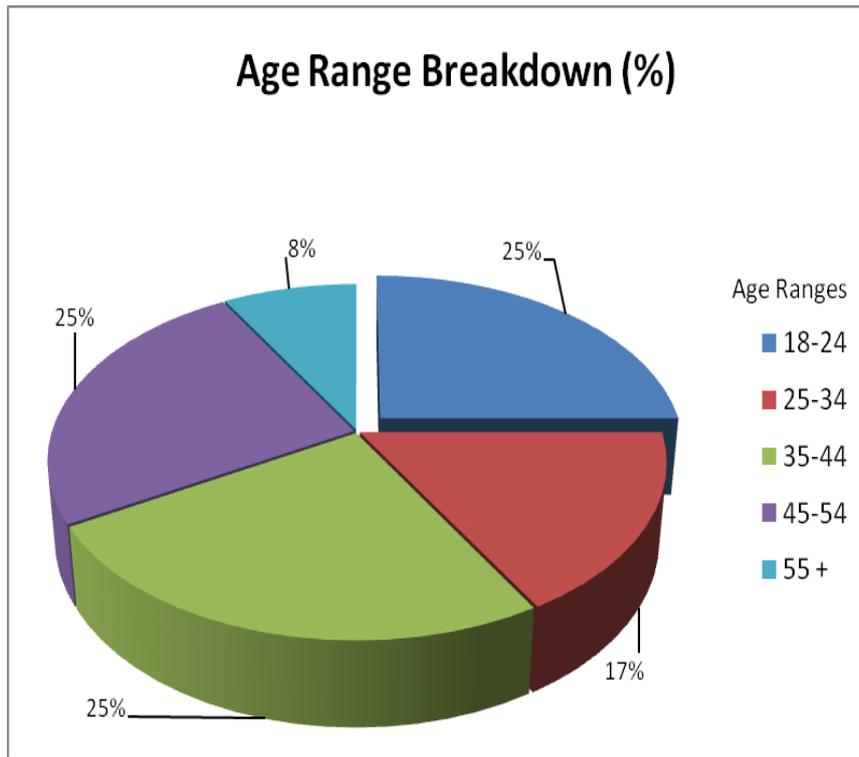


Belief (religious) affiliation

Religious Affiliation	Number	Percentage (%)
Christian	20	33
Muslim	05	8
*No religion (Atheist or Agnostic)	05	8
Other	20	34
Prefer not to say	10	17

*The focus of this study

8% of customers have "no religion". These respondents were the focus of the study.



Age	Number	Percentage (%)
18-24	15	25
25-34	10	17
35-44	15	25
45-54	15	25
55 +	05	8

Problems with this study:

- Not all respondents answered all questions
- Not all of the sample returned their questionnaires for analysis
- Some respondents declined to complete questionnaire after initially agreeing to participate
- Attempted to re-contact some respondents. Unable to clarify illegible written text or unclear statements as most respondents completed questionnaire anonymously

Summarised Responses to Questionnaire

The names have been changed to protect the identities of the respondents

Question 1: What is your background and early memories of your religious/spiritual up bringing?

Notes: Influence of your parents; how it shaped who you are now

All the respondents in this study were originally brought up or came from some denomination of Christianity. Most prominent were (in order):

Christian

Roman Catholic

Ethiopian Orthodox Church

Mr DP: "White, working class family; baptised as most kids were at that time. Cannot remember my parents being overly religious but do remember going to Sunday School for a while. My father spent 2 years in Italy during the Second World War and talked of his disgust that the RC church still expected the Italian poor to give money to the church when they had nothing, not even homes. Politics, rather than religion, was probably a greater factor in my upbringing; working class Labour supporters following a "Christian Socialist" ethic."

XD: "Church and Sunday School. That's the only thing I recognised I recognised as religion."

Question 2: What are you doing now (career wise)?

Notes: Are you employed, studying, looking for work?

Respondents in this study were:

- National Careers Service customers - employed and unemployed
- Employability tutors
- Finance Administrators
- Youth work and community action

Question 3: In your own words, how would you describe your religious views?

Notes: Are you an atheist, agnostic or other? - State what this actually means to you

Respondents in this study described themselves as:

- Atheist
- No description or category
- Agnostic
- XD: "Haven't got any...I know it seems comical or far-fetched but Jedi mindset of the force. Silly as that sounds, that is my absolute spot on (inaudible)"...It's the ideology."

Question 4: How did you come to your belief?

Mr K: "My mind works on evidence based facts, which seems to be absent where religion is involved. This is what turned me away from mainstream religion."

Mr DP: "Not entirely sure; probably something to do with my upbringing, where religion or faith was not a major topic of conversation; I also think my interest in history and politics from an early age led to me looking for empirical evidence rather than looking for explanations through religion."

Miss J: "I came to my belief by seeking, reading and proactive...living the truth the way I understand."

Miss GH: "Life" The problems that I have faced in my life and those around me have helped shaped my beliefs."

Ms C: "I took part in several spiritual activities - Ouija Board with 2 friends; sand drawing (allowing the spirits into you) and Mediums."

Question 5: Give an example of how your belief has negatively impacted you

Notes: Think about examples at work or in education. Consider how it has affected the choices you have made.

Mr DP: "I cannot recall any instance of a negative impact due to my beliefs; I've never felt it necessary to overtly espouse my views even when in the company of people openly religious. There was a period when my attitude was questioned when I used to refuse to stand for the National Anthem at sports events; (there are 2 concepts in the first line that I do not recognise); however, as I have got older I have mellowed somewhat and can understand why people saw my actions as negative (even if these were misplaced)."

Mr K: "People view me as weird; ostracised by some. There was a colleague at work who was talking up Islam, but when I challenged her religion, our working relationship turned for the worst and things between us turned from then on."

Mr S: "I cannot think of an example of this."

Miss J: "In early years, I have been forced at school to believe in communism and have no rejection or any beliefs. In Lithuania, when it was part of USSR at school children have been forced to believe in communism and not to practice any belief or religion."

Miss H: "My parents descend from the Caribbean but I was born and raised in London. My Father converted to Rastafarianism prior to my birth so I remember attending the Ethiopian Orthodox church from an early age. I never understood the reason why as they spoke a different language, dressed differently and their diet was also different. I now recognise, he was never truly a Rastafarian, he just chose their way of life in parts and ignored the rest. Today, I believe that if you are prepared to openly acknowledge your religious beliefs, you should live that way of life based on the teachings of that particular religion. If you don't, then you are not being honest to yourself and the person you call God."

Miss C: "I fear evil, due to looking into other cults. Was forced to attend religious ceremonies at school."

XD: "Relationships with women or people that believe in God...(with regard to education or work): none."

Question 6: Give an example of how your belief it has positively impacted you

Notes: Think about examples at work or in education. Consider how it has affected the choices you have made.

Mr DP: "Again, I cannot think of an instance where I have thought my belief has played a positive role; however, on reflection, it probably helped me to find a coping mechanism when my father died. I can understand how some people need to seek solace or understanding through religion when such an instance occurs but I didn't need to do this."

Mr K: "Because I have a rebellious and distrusting nature. Following the crowd makes me feel dubious but now I'm more confident in myself. I do not need an emotional crutch (religion) to make my educational and career decisions."

Miss H: "As I have no emotional attachment to any religion, I am able to assess a situation realistically. I do not believe it is 'God's will' why so many teenagers and young adults have been killed in London or why my parents failed at making a stable, happy family environment. Religion did not help them, nor is it the answer to these problems. Society needs to understand the importance and value of the family unit. I believe that strong, positive parenting and a close family unit is the main factor in guiding children through to adulthood the right way. Recognising that my own issues are a result of my parents poor decisions, enabled me to see where I can make improvements with my own life with the right choices. Religion was not needed to reach this conclusion."

Mr S: "I believe that because I am open-minded when it comes to religion, I am more understanding of the views and beliefs of others which is important because of the multi-cultural area in which I work."

Miss J: "Positive beliefs have helped me grow as a human; find my own truth and use it in the world!"

Miss C: "It has made me a better person I believe as I try to be open, honest and kind. I try not to take anyone's anger or negativity as a personal attack and continue to be as kind as I can be. I realise that I am responsible for myself and God won't judge me. At work I treat everyone with kindness because I judge me not God."

XD: "I look at things more scientifically or fact based."

Question 7: How do the people around you view your belief - particularly those who have opposing views?

Notes: Friends, family, education peers, work colleagues? What have they said and how has it made you feel?

Mr DP: "To a certain extent it is never discussed; my mother-in-law returned to the Catholic faith a little while ago and sends my wife and I prayers all the time; from my perspective it's harmless, more a reflection of her care for us, but I know it helps her in her day to day life. I would never think of denigrating her actions although the actual prayers mean nothing to me.

Religion and faith is sometimes a topic of discussion with friends but mainly from a political perspective; some of these friends have faith and others are more agnostic."

Mr K: "Agnostics/atheists are seen as an aberration from what is 'normal'. For the most part those around me like my work colleagues and friends just agree to disagree. Some have tried to convert me, but I refuse."

Miss H" None of my friends have questioned my beliefs."

Mr S: "Not many people are aware of my views as I tend not to discuss them. My family have always given me the freedom to make my own decisions and my friends are also open-minded."

Miss J: "Some people who wanted to impose their beliefs on me, I just accepted their views and carries on with my own beliefs, my own truth."

Miss H: "None of my friends have questioned my beliefs."

Miss C: "I do not discuss it really unless with people close to me who I feel will listen try to understand."

XD: "It varies...fundamentalists shun me."

Question 8: How has the National Career Service helped you and considered your beliefs (if at all?)

Mr K: "It has not in anyway. Nor has support been offered."

Mr DP: I can't say it has."

Mr S: " As I do not belong to anyone particular religious group this would not be relevant."

Miss J: "There was no such service available."

Miss H: "I can't say it has."

Miss C: "No help."

XD: "Doesn't come into it, hardly ever."

Question 9: Would or have you ever discussed your belief in a careers advice interview? If not, why not?

If yes, what would/did you discuss?

Notes: Also tell us what was said to you, how was this experience?

Mr DP: "No I have not, nor would I foresee a situation where I would discuss my beliefs in an interview; as a careers specialist of 20 years being non-judgemental is a central element of my practice."

Mr K - N/A

Mr S: "I don't tend to discuss my beliefs much as I don't believe that they are relevant within the context or work."

Miss J: "There was no such opportunity available."

Miss C: "No help."

XD: "Never, why would I?"

Question 10: If you had any needs relating to your belief would you discuss them with an employer or a college? If not, why not?

Mr DP: "Probably not."

Mr K: "Not sure, religion should for the most part be kept out of the business environment!"

Mr S: "If I had any particular needs I would definitely discuss it if it was of particular importance to me."

Miss J: "I would if I felt it is an appropriate situation that would allow the room for comfortable conversation."

Miss H: "I would not discuss my belief as it is quite a personal subject."

Miss C: "No - 2 reasons. Firstly...it is a 'grey' area and I do not feel there is any help I do not feel there is any help I could be given - secondly, it is no one's business."

XD: "They couldn't."

Question 11: How could we (National Careers Service) do better to help you with regard to your belief?

Mr DP: "I'm not sure anyone can."

Mr K "National Careers have failed in this regard, so I am unsure."

Mr S: "Due to both the nature of my beliefs and my relationship with National Careers Service, I feel that this would not be relevant."

Miss J: "Free expression, find and non-judgemental approach could help people to be honest about their own needs and truth. As a spiritualist I do not get special help or support e.g. time away from work to meditate."

Miss H: "I'm not sure anyone can."

Miss C: At least acknowledge agnostics and atheists on ethnicity forms and know the difference!"

XD: "They can't do anything."

Conclusions

The respondents in this study generally feel that very little (if anything) is done to help or support those who do not subscribe to a main stream religion such as Islam or Christianity or categorised as having a "non-belief".

The general consensus is that they do not need or require as much support as those who subscribe to a main stream religion. My sample tends to not have a string of rules, edicts or tenets that they need to abide by. It seems the sample operate on self sufficiency but are also not aware of what is available from the National Carers Service to help them.

Perhaps the onus is not on customers to request support *but* for the National Careers Service to be more proactive in engaging with this small but significant group. If minority groups are part of Government agenda, then why has this group been for the most part completely missed?

There was a slight feeling from some respondents of marginalisation; as though this was some aberration from society's belief as to what is acceptable when it comes to religion. This was a common theme particularly throughout the early years of their educational journey.

This may have contributed to their alienation from the National Careers Service. It is natural and understandable that this group would not be forthcoming in expressing their views.