

Reflecting your Christian ethos in your HR documents

Would someone know that your organisation had a Christian ethos from reading your HR documents? Does your recruitment literature make clear what your organisation stands for and, if you're asserting that someone must be a Christian to undertake the role, is it clear from the job description that this is the case? Do contracts of employment and HR policies reflect the Christian ethos of the organisation? In this short article, some general ideas are given for how to ensure that your Christian ethos is reflected in your HR documents.

In relation to recruitment, if you are asserting that the role for which you are advertising must be undertaken by a Christian, you should assert this in the job ad. Applicants should be furnished with a copy of the organisation's statement of faith so that they are clear on what the organisation stands for and what they will be required to subscribe to. In addition, the job description should reflect that it is an occupational requirement that the post-holder must be a Christian. If it is not clear from the job description why the role has to be undertaken by a Christian, then you are unlikely to be able to justify your assertion if it is subjected to a challenge. (More is said on this subject in *The Equality Act – Occupational Requirement*.)

In relation to the contract of employment, the law requires that employers provide an employee with a written statement of the main terms of their employment. This statement must cover matters such as the employee's place of work, rate of pay, holiday entitlement, sick pay entitlement and notice period. As a general rule, I recommend including everything that relates to the individual's contract with the organisation in the contract of employment and everything else that is an organisational policy should be in a policy handbook. Where the role carries a requirement that the post-holder must be a Christian, I recommend including reference to this in the contract.

There is freedom to assert the Christian ethos and values of the organisation in the HR policy handbook. Fundamentally, employment is about relationship. The bible has lots to say on this topic and there is an opportunity to reflect what the bible says about relationship in the HR policies. For example, the primary reason why a Christian organisation believes that bullying, harassment and discrimination in the workplace are wrong is that everyone is made in the image of God and therefore deserving of being treated with dignity and respect at all times. This is a higher motivation than mere compliance with the law.

In addition, there is an opportunity to bring the Christian approach to dispute resolution into the disciplinary and grievance procedures. The principle of the two people involved in a dispute seeking to resolve it informally between them is in keeping with both the ACAS Code of Practice and Jesus' teaching on how disputes should be handled.

The Equal Opportunities and recruitment policies should reflect the fact that, while unlawful discrimination is wrong, there are certain circumstances where the employer can and will assert that roles must be carried out by Christians. Too often I see Equal Opportunities policies that are lifted from a corporate environment with no provision for this and indeed where the reverse is explicitly stated – that religious belief will not affect recruitment decisions.

There are other opportunities to bring the Christian ethos and values into the HR policy handbook. For instance, maternity and paternity policies could contain a little more than procedural matters by affirming children as a blessing from God and expressing the organisation's commitment to celebrate with parents at this time of blessing in their lives.

In summary, if your organisation is based on a Christian ethos, then it makes perfect sense that the policies and procedures relating to your people reflect this.

For specific advice on this or for anything else to do with employment law or HR in your organisation, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Mark Mason is an employment lawyer and network associate of Global Connections. Mark advises employers and employees on all aspects of employment law and human resources practice and represents Claimants and Respondents in Employment Tribunal proceedings. Mark is experienced in advising churches and mission agencies on employment law and HR in their particular context. Mark has agreed to write regular articles on some of the topics that he is most commonly asked to advise on by churches and mission agencies.

These articles are intended to provide general information and guidance and are not to be relied upon as legal advice. For specific advice on a particular situation, you can contact Mark on 028 9084 8899 or email him at mark@markmasonlaw.co.uk. Please note that Global Connections members can benefit from an initial 30 minute no-cost telephone consultation.

To receive Mark's monthly employment law articles, please email mark@markmasonlaw.co.uk and ask him to add you to his mailing list.