

Formal Recognition of a Christian Workplace Group: Developing a Business Case



**Transform
WorkUK**

Inspiring Christians to transform the workplace and the nation

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Contents

Introduction	Page 3
Equality and Diversity.....	Page 4
Building the Business Case.....	Page 5
Examples of Documentation	Page 10

INTRODUCTION

Most organisations support a range of staff groups within their organisational diversity frameworks. This usually includes groups for Black and Minority Ethnic people; people with Disabilities; Women; and Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual people.

There are an increasing number of organisations that also accept and formally recognise the place of Christian Workplace Groups (CWGs) within their diversity frameworks. Formal recognition can bring significant benefits for the group and the organisation, some of which are discussed below.

To achieve formal recognition within an organisation, groups need to be clear about:

- the diversity framework of the organisation in which the CWG is to operate
- the aims and objectives of the group
- how the group will operate
- what is required of the group by the organisation
- the benefits the group will bring to the organisation

This document outlines the issues that need to be considered when putting a formal request to senior managers / HR for recognition of a CWG as a staff network.

It is important that prior to approaching senior managers a strong business case is prepared to explain exactly what you are asking of managers, and the reasons why they should agree formal recognition of the group, ie how this will be of benefit to the organisation.

An initial approach to managers to establish a CWG, may well elicit a response along these lines: 'Aren't diversity networks for those groups which sometimes experience discrimination? Christians aren't discriminated against, are they?' It is therefore important to make sure that basic groundwork has been undertaken before putting this request forward.

It is often helpful to start informal discussions with managers about the possibilities of formal recognition. This will ensure that they are aware of the potential request at an early stage enabling any concerns to be talked through openly. It may be beneficial to

invite a sympathetic senior manager to attend a CWG event and to seek advice on what concerns or issues managers may raise. The 'hearts and minds' approach often pays dividends.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Transform Work UK Team believe that the principles of equality and diversity should be supported by both managers and staff in all workplaces.

Equality and Diversity are overlapping principles, but they are not the same:

Equality in the workplace is fundamentally about fairness, ensuring that all employees have equality of opportunity to maximise their talents and are not discriminated against in any way. This does not mean that all people are treated in the same way, rather ensuring that individual differences and needs do not place them in a disadvantageous position in any work related situation.

Diversity in the workplace is concerned with recognising that all people are unique and that difference between employees is something to be celebrated. The ability of

employees to express individual aspects of their personalities at work is likely to bring more resources to the workplace, produce greater job satisfaction for individuals, and promote a more productive and inclusive workplace environment. In many cases, this will result in members of the general public receiving improved services from the organisation.

No Diversity without Equality If a sound equality structure is not in place within the workplace, then it will not be possible to have an effective diversity framework. It is



important therefore that CWG members are comfortable in how their group will function within both frameworks. This will need some discussion as a group.

Equality and Diversity at the heart of the Good News In a patriarchal society, Jesus treated women with respect. He mixed with the poor, the marginalised, those considered to be outcasts, people with disabilities, people with dreaded skin diseases, people with mental health problems, people possessed by evil spirits, people of different nationalities and from different traditions; people living by a different moral code. Jesus did not reject or seek to avoid any of these people. Jesus met all who came to him with love and respect no matter what they had done. He might not always have approved of the behaviour of some or their lifestyles, but his starting point was love and respect. Principles of equality and diversity are firmly rooted in the Kingdom of God.

Diversity Networks Diversity networks are therefore important to:

- employers
- one another
- the organisation as a whole
- the community
- God's Kingdom

Christians have a legitimate role in the workplace and, in the tradition of Jesus, have as a starting point love and friendship for one another and for all work colleagues.

BUILDING A BUSINESS CASE FOR FORMAL RECOGNITION OF A GROUP

When building a business case for formal recognition, bear in mind that managers and HR are likely to ask questions such as:

- what will the group do?
- what benefits will the group bring to the organisation?

Building a Business Case

- what is the group's attitude to other diversity groups?
- how will the group work with other network groups?
- why should the organisation support a single faith group? Wouldn't it be better to have a multi-faith group or forum?
- what does the group want from the organisation?

Each of these questions is explored further below.

1. What will the group do?

In building a case for formal recognition, develop clear aims and objectives for the group. For example, the group will probably aim to:

- serve the organisation faithfully
- share the Christian faith with others
- provide an opportunity for colleagues to learn about the Christian faith
- encourage Christians to be themselves at work

Several examples of aims and objectives drawn up by different groups are given at the links at the bottom of this page.

Other things to consider in preparing the case:

- agree on frequency and location of group meetings
- identify the sorts of activities the group will undertake (both during and outside meetings)
- be clear on how the group wishes to advertise its activities
- clarify how the group will communicate in general (both within itself and to the wider organisation)
- propose a reporting mechanism with managers and HR to keep them updated on what the group is doing

2. What benefits will the group bring to the organisation?

A CWG can bring many benefits to the organisation, which may include the following:

- commitment and increased contribution to the organisation by those who are part of the group
- making the most of skills and abilities
- releasing potential in the workplace
- bringing the sum of employee attributes to work in a positive manner
- commitment to colleagues
- pastoral support of individuals
- increased commitment from Christian workers to the organisation
- contribute to raising ethical standards within the organisation
- external recognition of the organisation's positive diversity policy (enhances image, assists recruitment)
- increased effectiveness in working with other diversity networks
- celebration of one another's contributions to the workplace



3. What is the group's attitude to other diversity groups?

It is important that the CWG has a positive attitude towards other diversity groups, whether they exist formally or not. Other diversity groups have just as much reason to request recognition as the Christian group.

Building a Business Case

Christians in the Audit Commission (CiTAC) developed a statement to deal with this: 'We unconditionally support all workplace colleagues in their right to representation in the workplace; that we support their right to be treated with an absence from prejudice, that we wish to love and befriend all our colleagues, whilst maintaining our own specific beliefs.'

4. How will the group work with other network groups?

From time to time, the group may wish to consider putting on joint events with other diversity groups. Such joint projects could include:

- multi-faith events looking at topics such as 'How does my faith influence my work?'
- working groups to develop materials on how teams can work together when there is a diverse range of beliefs and attitudes within a team.



5. Single-faith Groups vs Multi-faith Forums

Some groups might encounter the question: 'Why should we support a single faith group - wouldn't it be better to have a multi-faith group or forum?'. There is no standard response as to whether a CWG should participate in a multi-faith forum. Any such proposal requires careful thought and prayer. There are however, a number of factors that groups should consider in determining their response. These include the following:

- is the proposed multi-faith group supporting diversity and promoting faith in the workplace or trying to avoid the difference?
- there is no reason why an organisation cannot support more than one faith group.

Building a Business Case

- different faiths may wish to support their believers in different ways.
- in the main, people of different faiths are happy to work alongside one another.

6. What does the group want from the organisation?

This will vary from group to group, but suggestions include:

- a time and place to meet
- opportunities to meet occasionally with managers/HR
- channels and opportunities to contribute to the organisation
- resources, eg photocopying, materials
- agreement for newsletters, posters and other communication channels.
- agreement for celebrating Christian events eg Christmas, Easter
- funding, where possible
- agreed time for the leader to spend on leadership activities

Seek God's view on the pace that He wants you to move at, but don't be afraid to be bold!

The business case may be delivered to managers orally, at a meeting, perhaps after a short presentation, or written down in a structured fashion. Discuss this with the appropriate manager/HR contact at an early stage in the process to help you shape your approach.

EXAMPLES OF DOCUMENTATION

On the following pages we offer 6 examples of documents that have been prepared for recognition by a range of groups, in national and local government and in industry. Read through the various documents, and extract ideas that may be relevant to your case for recognition.

E.ON Christian Network - Vision, Purpose and Meetings

Vision: That Christians working across E.ON would feel part of an authentic and vibrant Christian community which is a blessing to the company: united, active, supportive and providing a focal point for Christians throughout E.ON.

Purpose: We intend to bless the company through a faithful expression of Christian labour, love, integrity and compassion at work; To help Christians focus on and serve God while at work; and to be a friendly and authentic community of believers – to be here for each other. All are welcome to the local meetings and activities of E.ON Christians Network (ECN). The hardest step is often to walk through the door the first time so it may help to contact your local ECN site rep (as listed on the Within the Workplace page) to break the ice before attending your first meeting. In short, we're a collection of site based groups of Christians across E.ON who meet up to chat, encourage each other and pray.

Be part of: By joining the E.ON Christian Network (ECN) you will automatically get the monthly newsletters, and be invited to the monthly telephone conference calls.

Groups meet **every week** and the meeting is usually held in one of the local meeting rooms or local off site venue, during lunch breaks. Meetings are between 30 minutes and 1 hour, but people are most welcome to stay as long as they can, and leave when they wish, work permitting.

As meeting times and location can change, it is best to be on the ECN email list. An email is sent out each week to those wishing to be on the mailing list, which notifies you of the next room and time as well as details of special events (link to be added to email list).

Each site lists exactly when and where each week's group meetings will take place. Sites involved are: Bedford, Bolton, Grain Ps, Greenwood, Newlands, Newstead, Sherwood, Technology Centre, Westwood.

Examples of Documentation

BT Christian Network - A document describing the BT Christian Network

The BT Christian Network is one of several different Networks supported by BT. Our goal is to be a real benefit to both BT and its employees through positively contributing to workplace issues and supporting members where needed. We think being a positive approach is crucial to our role. There are three specific objectives which BTCN has adopted:

- Acting as a central reference point for Christian information in BT
- Providing a Christian perspective on business policy and strategies
- Supporting and encouraging Christians in BT

BT Christian Network has about 900 members worldwide. With people in about 15 countries (although most are based in UK), we have regular prayer cover from our members and about 10 different groups meeting regularly. This includes overseas in India and Hungary. We also have a young professionals group. BTCN is formally recognised by BT Inclusion scheme as a valid support group in the workplace. We meet regularly with HR to discuss issues, achievements and improvements. Alpha workplace courses are sometimes run for employees interested in finding out more about the Christian faith (about 7 done so far).

Some of our key initiatives are listed below:

- Free bibles (about 1,200 given away)
- Prayer requests for anyone who wants them
- Regular weekly thoughts sent out
- Bible in a year study/reading programme ran for several years
- Speakers via conference calls
- Summer camp run on a few occasions
- Open days

In conjunction with other BT groups and HR we recently ran a 2 day open event for all BT staff via our corporate website. During this time people could see information about Jesus, and also about the BT Christian Network, and they were able to ask questions, raise queries or place comments.

The group is organised via a leadership team that meets twice monthly; once a month, mainly for prayer, and once a month for planning. Local fellowships or interest groups support members on the ground. The chair meets with HR once a month. Our website is organised into a Social Media style so members can share news stories. We have an inspiration page where people can find more about Jesus and Christianity and a daily prayer for the day on this site. There is also a face book page available.

Examples of Documentation

Home Office Christian Network - Vision, Objective and Aims

Our Vision

We seek to live, promote and work by the Christian principles of truth, love, justice and mercy within the Home Office and build a community where all people are supported and valued.

Our Objectives

- We support staff in the workplace
- We work to help staff understand Christian beliefs
- We develop good relationships with stakeholders to help build a fair and just society and reduce crime

Our Aims

- V to provide a voice for the views of Christians in the Home Office
- A to increase awareness of Christian beliefs through innovative engagement and the excellence of our work
- L to build relationships and lead community engagement in partnership with others
- U to inform and influence policy to be understanding of Christian needs
- E to educate and share Christian values in the Home Office
- S to support Christian and other staff in the workplace

Examples of Documentation

Anglian Water (Thorpe Wood House Peterborough) Christian Group - Background and Aims and Objectives

Background We have been meeting at Thorpe Wood House for the last 12 years and we believe Christianity is not just for church, it's for every aspect of life including the workplace.

Aims and Objectives Our aims and objectives are in alignment with Anglian Water's approach of innovation, collaboration and transformation:

- **Innovation** – Innovation is the application of better solutions to changing requirements and needs. As a group we support one another through prayer and bible study seeing how Jesus' message can encourage and guide us in our work.
- **Collaboration** – Christianity welcomes people from all backgrounds and we support one another through encouragement, support and finding solutions to life's problems encouraging a positive outlook.
- **Transformation** – We believe Jesus sought to transform lives leading to the transformation of attitudes. The ongoing support of our members has led to the uplift of morale and ultimately performance in the workplace and a happier home life.

Christians in the Audit Commission - Aims and Objectives

Prior to the Government decision to close the Audit Commission, Christians in the Audit Commission (CiTAC) had operated effectively as a staff group for a number of years. Its aims and objectives were as follows:

- To serve the Commission faithfully
- To share our faith with others
- To provide an opportunity to learn about Christian faith and practice

CiTAC developed a statement expressing its overarching view to all workplace colleagues: 'We unconditionally support all workplace colleagues in their right to representation in the workplace; that we support their right to be treated with an absence from prejudice, that we wish to love and befriend all our colleagues, whilst maintaining our own specific beliefs.'

Examples of Documentation

PwC Christian Network

Long term dream: a global community living out Jesus' Lordship at PwC

5 year goal: a UK community that understands and demonstrates the relevance of God to PwC

Daily focus: How is God relevant to this?

Group structure:

- Sponsor partner and steering committee overseeing activities across the UK. A representative from diversity is invited to steering committee meetings.
- Network of office group leaders. This covers around 20 offices.
- Activities are organised at a national and local level.
- The group is based in the UK firm but increasingly has contacts with Christians in PwC across the globe. This is in-line with the firm's overall strategy.

Activities:

The activities run by the group vary from office to office but focus on encouraging each other in our faith at work, prayer, and reaching out to others. When organising an activity we link it back to our goal of understanding and demonstrating how God is relevant to PwC. Weekly meetings (usually involving a time to catch-up, pray, discuss a bible passage, share testimonies about what God is doing in PwC)

- Prayer meetings
- External speaker events
- Alpha and Christianity Explored Courses
- Outreach activities at Christmas and Easter – mince pie hand out, carol service, Easter egg hunts, shoe shining, gospel talks, showing biblical based films, etc.
- Bring your church to work days
- Events with other diversity groups
- Communications: email, posters, plasma screen adverts, internal social networking site
- Bi-weekly blogs



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