

# Religion and belief policy

## 1 Introduction

The University of Southampton is a diverse international community of people many of whom have religious and other beliefs. As part of its commitment to equality and diversity and to creating a tolerant and inclusive community, the University recognises it is important that all are treated with equal dignity and respect, which includes respect for religious or other beliefs. The University is concerned with permitting and facilitating the free practice of religion by its staff and students. This policy details the ways in which the University demonstrates respect for religious and other faith based beliefs and it covers in its scope staff and students and those who have applied to become staff or students.

## 2 Policy Statement

The right to religious freedom means that staff and students should not be forced to act against their convictions nor restrained from acting in accordance with their convictions in religious matters in private or in public or in association with others. This right to religious freedom is given recognition through this policy. It is recognised that staff and students who celebrate a particular faith will seek to give external expression to their faith. The University does not seek to control or restrict religious activity but rather to provide a means, as described below, for its expression.

However, people while giving expression to their belief individually or in association should be sensitive in seeking to spread their religious belief and avoid any action, which suggests coercion, dishonest or unworthy persuasion. Such a manner of acting must be considered an infringement of the freedom provided and an infringement of the rights of others. Employees should not be using work time to proselytise.

## 3 Policy context

It is expected that everyone, and in particular those with management responsibilities, within the University community will adhere to this policy and behave in ways that are sensitive to and respectful of others religious or other faith-based belief and the ways in which faith is demonstrated or practised. This includes visitors to any of the University campuses and halls of residence.

The policy should be read as part of the wider set of policies, including equality and diversity, within the University that includes:

- Equal Opportunities policy
- Harassment policy and procedures
- Grievance procedures for staff
- Regulations governing student complaints
- Academic appeals procedure
- Learning and teaching strategy
- Strategy for widening participation
- Freedom of Speech Code of Practice to Secure Freedom of Speech within the Law

Any member of the University community who feels they have been treated in ways that breach this policy should first discuss it with their line manager or tutor with a view to resolution. If this is unsuccessful, individuals can access the procedure appropriate to their situation, for example grievance or harassment. The Head of Staff Diversity can advise.

## 4 Definition of a Religious or other Belief

For the purposes of this policy, religious or other belief is defined as any religion, religious belief or philosophical belief that has a clear belief system or profound belief that affects the way of life or view of the world of the believer. There may also be collective worship, such as in churches, mosques or gurdwaras.

As examples, the following are faiths covered by this policy:

- Baha'i
- Buddhism
- Christianity
- Confucianism
- Taoism
- Hindu
- Islam
- Jain
- Judaism
- Rastafarian
- Sikh
- Zoroastrian (Parsee)

This list is not exhaustive and there will be other religious and other faith-based beliefs that will fall within the definition given in this policy. At the University student societies exist to provide support to people of faith. These include the Catholic Society, Christian Union, Islamic Society and Jewish Society. There is no legal requirement to monitor for religion or belief and we do not intend to do so given the sensitivity involved in seeking and holding such data.

## 5 Religious Observance

### 5.1 Time off

All staff, regardless of their religious belief or non-belief are required to work in accordance with the contract.

Staff members in the University community may request to take annual paid leave from their leave entitlement or other leave to participate in their religious celebrations, festivals or ceremonies. It is the responsibility of those members wishing to participate to inform their line manager or tutor in good time to enable arrangements to be made. To assist in planning and maximising the opportunity for time off to be granted, people should, where possible, make leave requests reasonably in advance of requiring such time off.

For staff, the line manager will consider all requests in the light of workloads and the affect that any absence will have on the service. Requests will not be refused unreasonably and if refused, the line manager will give reasons. Time off can normally be accommodated using annual leave, time off in lieu or exceptionally unpaid leave, especially where the leave is requested for a pilgrimage or to attend ceremonies related to births, weddings or deaths where relatives live at some distance.

Students that take time off to participate in their religious festivals will be expected to make up any missed learning opportunities.

Members of the University community may also observe the traditions of their religion and pray at certain times of day. They will be able to do this provided they have made arrangements in advance with their manager or tutor as appropriate. Arrangements that are made to facilitate such prayer will also consider the affect that they might have on others and be sensitive to those.

The University will take every reasonable effort to accommodate requests for facilities, such as quiet rooms, subject to space and other constraints. Where it is not possible to accommodate requests, reasons will be given and every effort will be made to seek alternatives, which may include access to local community facilities and the Head of Staff Diversity can provide information as requested. The University is home to an ecumenical Chaplaincy at Highfield Campus, which has a designated space for prayer.

A calendar of religious festivals is available as a link in the Staff Diversity pages of the Human Resources website.

Any concerns about the provision of time off to participate in religious festivals or to pray should be addressed to the Head of Staff Diversity who can offer further advice and support.

## 5.2 Dress

The University does not operate a formal dress code and it is therefore appropriate and a welcome part of our wish to express cultural diversity on campus for people to wear religious dress (including, for example, sari, turbans, skullcaps, hijab, kippah, mangal sutra and clerical collars). Where a person is required to wear overalls, protective clothing or uniforms these will be adapted wherever possible to enable the person to wear their religious dress without endangering their health and safety or that of others. For staff or students who will be located for work or study in clinical or laboratory spaces or workshops particular rules or dress codes may apply and these must be complied with.

Health and safety of members of the University community is the priority consideration and exceptionally where the health and safety of the person wearing the dress, is compromised (or that of others) it may be necessary to request that the person does not wear that dress or a particular aspect thereof. This will be handled with sensitivity and reasons given.

If there is any dispute or there is some concern about health and safety implications about a particular form of dress, the Safety Office will advise.

The wearing of slogans and symbols on clothes which may be considered offensive, for example related to racism or sexism, will be a breach of this policy and as such may result in disciplinary action. There needs to be a tolerance and recognition of the accepted symbols of religious groups.

## 5.3 Titles

Recognised or ordained ministers or leaders of religious communities may have particular titles or designations (for example, Iman, Reverend). These titles may be used in the University, for example in internal directories, calendars, letterheads etc.

## 5.4 Duties

The University engages in many activities and research projects which in some circumstances an individual may morally object to on the grounds of their religious or other belief. The University accepts that such situations may arise in such a diverse and international community. Where such a situation arises and an individual is required as part of their duties where they are a member of staff, or in their studies for students, to undertake activities that they object to on the grounds of religious or other belief, they should inform their manager or tutor of this. This should include the reasons why the activity they are being required to undertake are morally or on religious grounds objectionable. Every effort will be made to reorganise the duties or studies, where at all possible, to accommodate such objections. The Head of Staff Diversity will advise in such situations.

## 5.5 Facilities

Prayer rooms or worship space do not need to be provided but it is recognised by the University that to do so would be good practice and consistent with our aims in relation to diversity. It is recognised that if facilities are provided to one religious group then, as far as possible and practical, equivalent or comparative facilities should also then be made available to others who make that request appropriate to their needs as reasonably assessed.

## 5.6 Practical Considerations

The following are some practical implications of this policy.

- Food – In providing food for events and working lunches, vegetarian options should be made available. These should be clearly labelled as such and be separate from other food items that contain meat and/ or fish. Dependent on the types of event catered food it may also be appropriate to provide halal or kosher options and to give due respect to those present who may be fasting. In the overall catering provision, where there is sufficient demand, and it is practical to do so, food to meet religious dietary requirements will be provided.
- Drink – There should always be water and soft drinks available for all catered events. Alcohol can be provided but should be served separately.
- Prayer – Organisers of events, including conferences, should consider the provision of prayer facilities and the timing of breaks to enable people to pray should they wish.
- Examinations – Examinations should be timetabled to avoid, wherever possible, recognised religious celebrations, festivals or ceremonies and key prayer times.
- Open days – Open days should take account of the impact of religious festivals and major festivals avoided.
- Recruitment and selection – Advertising should be in ways that are accessible to a diverse audience. There should be clarity in the requirements of posts, for example if there is a requirement to handle meat or to serve alcohol etc. Requests to have the dates and/ or timings altered on the grounds of religion should be treated sympathetically and rescheduled. Particular attention should be paid to the timings of overnight stays and facilities provided.
- Lectures and staff development opportunities – It is important in all learning opportunities that the language is inclusive, as are the types of case studies and examples relied upon. The timing of staff development opportunities or conferences should take into account religious celebrations, festivals or ceremonies.
- Missed learning opportunities – Missed learning opportunities resulting from participation in religious festivals must be made up by the student. However tutors can support this by ensuring that lecture notes are available and where extensions to assignment deadlines are sought, they are considered in the light of the impact of the absence.

The Head of Staff Diversity will be able to advise and offer further assistance on any aspects of this policy and has information on various faiths available.

## 5.7 Statutory Rights

The Employment Equality (Religious or Belief) Regulations 2003, in force from 2 December 2003, prevent discrimination on grounds of religion or belief and discrimination by way of victimisation or harassment on grounds of religion or belief by act or deliberate omission. These regulations require:

1. Individuals must not be treated less favourably on grounds of religion or belief and that
2. Practices or provision should apply equally to persons not of the same religion or belief; and
3. Practices or provisions must not put people of the same religion or belief at a disadvantage when compared with other persons.

Behaviour that offends, intimidates, is hostile, degrading or humiliating towards a member of staff or student on the basis of their faith or faith practice or assumptions about the same will constitute harassment and will be cause for disciplinary action.