

# RELIGION, BELIEF AND STUDY POLICY FOR STUDENTS

<b>Responsible:</b>	Executive Lead Education
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### 1. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

- 1.1. This Policy has been designed with reference to the [Equality Act 2010](#). This is to ensure recognition of the diversity of belief in the University community and that no one is subject to bullying, discrimination or harassment based on religion or belief, including no religion or belief. The University celebrates and values the diversity of its community and provides a supportive context in which all students can be their authentic selves, explore new ideas and experiences, and engage critically with received beliefs and understanding, regardless of any characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.
- 1.2. The University of Westminster does not have any religious affiliation and is not aligned with any denomination or faith. However, the University recognises the freedom of individuals and groups to express their religious or non-religious beliefs. Through its [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policies and Procedures](#), the University seeks to foster academic and creative freedom and ensure that all students, irrespective of their religious or belief system, including no religion or belief, are treated in accordance with the [University's values and core principles](#). Further information can be found on the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion website](#).
- 1.3. The University's [Education Strategy](#) outlines the University's commitment to providing a personalised and authentic education underpinned by an inclusive curriculum. In all learning and assessment opportunities the language, and the types of case studies and examples provided, must be inclusive.
- 1.4. This Policy and the University's [Religious Observance Calendar](#) apply to all undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral research students studying at London Campuses only. Different arrangements may be necessary for University of Westminster International Campuses.

## 2. POLICY STATEMENT

- 2.1. The University of Westminster is committed to embracing diversity and promoting equality amongst its student body and values its diverse community of students with their religious and other beliefs, including no religion or belief. In doing so, the University recognises that ethnicity and culture are not indicative of religion or belief and that all religions have a variety and range of doctrines, which may reflect different values and customs. Fair treatment involves taking difference into account, not treating everyone the same.
- 2.2. It is recognised that students and colleagues who celebrate a belief may want to give it external expression and the University aims to provide a respectful environment for this. The right to religious freedom means that no one should be forced to act against their convictions, religion or beliefs in private, in public, or in association with others. While giving expression to their belief individually or in association, people are expected to show sensitivity and respect for the opinions and human rights and freedoms of others if they wish to spread their belief.
- 2.3. This policy aims to ensure that students are not placed at a disadvantage because of their religion or belief, including no religion or belief. Wherever practicable, the University will provide appropriate facilities and information to support students and will seek to resolve clashes between academic activities and essential religious observances as outlined in the [Religious Observance Calendar](#), where possible.
- 2.4. This policy is informed by and links to the following policies and information sources:
- [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#)
  - [Diversity and Dignity at Work and Study Policy](#)
  - [Equality Act 2010](#)
  - [Equality and Human Rights Commission: Your rights under the Equality Act 2010](#)
  - [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies](#)
  - [Faith and Spirituality website](#)
  - [Mitigating Circumstances Claims](#)
  - [Religious Observance Calendar](#)
  - [Student Complaints Procedure](#)
  - [Student Event Booking Process](#)
  - [UK Bank Holidays](#)

## 3. BREACHES OF THE POLICY

- 3.1. Any student who feels they have been treated in a way that breaches this Policy should first discuss it with their Personal Tutor (taught students) or Director of Studies (doctoral research students) with a view to finding an informal resolution. If this is unsuccessful, individuals can access the procedure appropriate to their situation, and the [Diversity and Dignity at Work and Study Policy](#) provides a framework for students and colleagues to bring complaints about bullying, harassment, and victimisation. For students this could be via the [Report and Support platform](#) or the [Student Complaints Procedure](#).
- 3.2. Behaviour that intimidates, is hostile, degrading or humiliating towards a University colleague or fellow student based on their belief or belief practice, or assumptions about the same, constitutes harassment and will be cause for disciplinary action.

## **4. DEFINITION OF A RELIGIOUS OR OTHER BELIEF**

4.1. Religion or belief is a protected characteristic under the [Equality Act 2010, Section 10](#) and protects against discrimination on the basis of religion, philosophical belief, non-belief, or lack of belief. The Equality Act 2010 provides the following definitions:

- Religion or belief can mean any religion as long as it has a clear structure and belief system. This also covers non-belief and lack of religion or belief.
- A philosophical belief must be genuinely held and more than an opinion. It must be cogent, serious and apply to an important aspect of human life or behaviour.

4.2. Further information about definitions and rights under the Equality Act 2010 can be found on the [Equality and Human Rights Commission website](#).

## **5. DRESS**

5.1. The University does not operate a formal dress code. The wearing of religious dress on campus is welcome and reflects our wish to express cultural diversity on campus.

5.2. Rules or dress codes may apply if students are required to study in clinical or laboratory spaces. These must be complied with, as the health and safety of members of the University community is the priority consideration. If a person is required not to wear an aspect of their chosen dress, this will be handled with sensitivity and reasons provided.

5.3. Students who are undertaking an internship or placement with an external organisation are expected to observe any dress code required by the external provider.

5.4. Please see section 9.5.4 for information about identity checks for examinations.

## **6. FACILITIES**

6.1 The University will, as far as is practicable, make reasonable efforts to provide suitable facilities for those who observe a particular belief. This will include contemplation and prayer rooms across the University campuses. Further information on the facilities available can be found on the [Faith & Spirituality website](#).

6.2 In certain circumstances faith groups may wish to request the booking of a large room for prayer. Such bookings must be requested through the [Student Event Booking Process](#).

6.3 In the spirit of embracing diversity, the University recognises that some religions may require formal segregation between men and women during collective religious worship. Where a room has been booked for such purposes these arrangements must be made through the [Student Event Booking Process](#). Segregation based on gender does not apply for teaching, scholarly or other social activities.

## **7. RELIGIOUS SOCIETIES**

7.1 Religious societies, working within the policy and guidelines of the University and affiliated to the University of Westminster Students' Union (UWSU), are free to invite guest speakers

for meetings from religious communities outside the University. This must be done within the framework set out in the [University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#). Affiliated SU societies must submit all room booking and external speaker requests through the [Student Event Booking Process](#).

- 7.2 Student initiatives regarding faith and spirituality, other than by invitation through UWSU societies, are the responsibility of the [Faith and Spirituality team](#) and must follow the framework set out in the [University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#).

## **8. RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE CALENDAR**

- 8.1. The [Faith and Spirituality team](#) produce the [University's Religious Observance Calendar](#) which will be submitted annually for approval by the Teaching Committee. This calendar will identify principal religious festivals and include a list of specific religious observance dates (and, where appropriate, times of day) on which certain University activities should be avoided where possible.
- 8.2. Religious observance dates will be those dates (or specific times of day on those dates), determined at the absolute judgement of the [Faith and Spirituality Team](#), on which it would be unreasonable to expect a follower of a recognised religion to engage with the University's learning and teaching opportunities or assessment requirements, due solely to the obligations of that religion.

## **9. TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT**

### **9.1. Academic Calendar**

- 9.1.1 The structure of the [academic calendar](#) is approved by Academic Council on recommendation by the Teaching Committee.
- 9.1.2 The [University calendar](#) and timetable seek to support the spirit of diversity and inclusiveness which underpins this Policy. However, in common with other UK Higher Education Providers, the structure of the academic calendar is constrained by the [UK Bank Holidays](#), limited resources which require us to deliver programmes in a time efficient manner, and by the need to ensure security and equality of treatment for all those sitting assessments.

### **9.2. Teaching**

- 9.2.1 The [University's Timetabling Policy](#) supports the provision of an inclusive and accessible learning and working environment. The construction of the timetable will take into account the published [religious observance dates](#), as far as practicable. However, in order to deliver teaching and learning requirements efficiently and effectively within the available time and space, some teaching and other learning opportunities may have to be scheduled on [religious observance dates](#). For these reasons, the timetable cannot accommodate the diversity of religious observance requirements on campus.
- 9.2.2 The University understands that there may be occasions when a student may be absent due to religious observance. If this means that a student will miss a lecture or other scheduled learning opportunity, the student must notify their module leader(s) in advance

as a matter of courtesy. The student must then enter an absence notice in the [attendance monitoring system](#) as per the guidance on the [Student Engagement and Attendance website](#). Extended periods of leave for religious observance purposes, such as pilgrimages, will not be approved and these should be planned for outside of term time.

9.2.3 Students may observe the requirements of their religion and pray at certain times of the day. They should, wherever possible, fulfil their obligation to pray either before or after classes. Where the class is longer than an hour, a student should speak to the lecturer beforehand to arrange to pray during the break and return before the break ends. Where students have to meet the requirements of regular religious observance at a specific time, it may be possible to request a change of seminar group via the [Student Centre](#). Please note that it may not be possible to accommodate all requests to change seminar group.

9.2.4 Missed learning opportunities resulting from participation in prayer and other religious obligations must be made up by the student by speaking to the Module Leader and referring to relevant information on the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) such as handouts, lecture recordings etc. Module Leaders and Class Tutors should be supportive in this by ensuring that lecture information is available on the VLE for students to access

### **9.3. Assessments Scheduled Outside Formal Examination Periods**

9.3.1 Many courses and modules include summative scheduled assessments which are undertaken outside the [formal examination periods](#), including in-class tests, lab tests, presentations, practicals, vivas, performances etc.

9.3.2 Course and Module Leaders shall ensure that assessment dates and times are published at the outset of the course/module and as far as is practicable, not schedule such assessments on religious observance dates (or times of day) as specified in the [Religious Observance Calendar](#). Flexibility should be exercised, where practicable, but must not compromise the academic integrity of the assessment.

9.3.3 Where it is not possible for the scheduled assessment to be held other than on a [religious observance date](#), and/or a student is unable to attend University as a result of religious observance, the student should submit a [Mitigating Circumstances claim](#) in accordance with the requirements of the [Mitigating Circumstances Policy and regulations](#). The student will be offered a deferral to the next available opportunity, except where the Faith and Spirituality team is unable to confirm that the scheduled assessment coincides with a day of religious observance, as published in the [Religious Observance Calendar](#).

### **9.4. Coursework Deadlines**

9.4.1 Students should familiarise themselves with the coursework deadlines at the start of the relevant module. Deadlines for handing in assessed work will not be extended to allow for religious observance, and students must schedule their work accordingly and submit prior to the deadline if necessary.

### **9.5. Examinations**

9.5.1 The Timetabling Team will endeavour to avoid scheduling [formal examinations](#), held during the examination period, on days of religious observance as identified in the [Religious](#)

[Observance Calendar](#). However, due to the restrictions of scheduling many examinations within a time-constrained period, and that many religious observance dates can fall within a range of dates, it cannot be guaranteed that this will always be possible. As part of the exam timetabling process, students will be able to submit a Religious Observance Request Form to identify any potential clashes with key religious observance requirements. The Timetabling team will try and accommodate these, but where this is not possible, alternative arrangements may have to be made for the students to sit the examination at a different time which may require a chaperoning arrangement to be put in place.

- 9.5.2 The University understands that there may be occasions when a student may be unable to attend an examination due to religious observance. If this means that a student will miss the examination, the student can submit a [Mitigating Circumstances claim](#) requesting a deferral to the next available assessment period. No evidence will be required to support the Mitigating Circumstances Claim, except where the [Faith and Spirituality team](#) is unable to confirm that the examination coincides with a day of religious observance, as published in the [Religious Observance Calendar](#).
- 9.5.3 During the [formal examination period](#), students should arrange to pray at lunch time, and then to fulfil their afternoon prayer obligations after the end of an afternoon examination. Students are not permitted to leave the examination room to pray and any student who leaves the examination room without the express permission of the invigilator will not be allowed to re-enter. This is in line with [Section 7 of the Assessment Regulations for Taught Courses](#).
- 9.5.4 If the clothes worn by any candidate for an assessment or formal examination make the identification of that person difficult, they should bring some form of identification with a signature to the examination room and replicate that signature in the presence of the invigilator on request. Otherwise they will be required to reveal their face to an invigilator of the same gender in private, sufficiently to allow their identity to be checked.

## **9.6. Postgraduate Research Students**

- 9.6.1 Doctoral research students must refer to the guidance in the [Research Degree Handbook](#) if they wish to request an adjustment to an Annual Progress Review (APR) submission deadline, viva date, or deadline for post-viva amendments.
- 9.6.2 These processes can only be delayed in exceptional circumstances and approval must be gained from the [Graduate School Office](#).

## **10. FURTHER INFORMATION**

- 10.1 For issues surrounding religious aspects of this Policy please contact the [Faith and Spirituality Team](#).
- 10.2 For aspects referring to academic regulations please contact the [Student Centre](#) who will refer the matter to the Academic Registrar's Department.