

UWE Religion and Belief Policy

Policy to protect against discrimination on the grounds of religion, belief or non-belief.

Religion and Belief Policy Statement

As part of UWE's core commitment to promoting equality and diversity, we aim to provide an inclusive learning and working environment where students and staff of all religions or beliefs, or who have no belief, can thrive.

The University seeks to ensure that:

1. Individuals are not treated less favourably than others because of their actual or perceived religion, belief or non-belief.
2. Policies, practices and provisions are based on relevant criteria, which do not discriminate on grounds of religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief (except in the case of a genuine occupational requirement).
3. Policies, practices and provisions do not put people of any specific religion or belief at a disadvantage when compared to other persons.
4. Individuals and groups are treated with dignity and fairness whatever their religious and/or other beliefs may be.
5. Where possible, appropriate services are provided to meet the cultural and religious needs of all staff and students.

UWE recognises that the spiritual and moral systems that religions and beliefs offer can often be of fundamental importance to the wellbeing of students and staff. Religious rituals, such as dress, diet and prayer, can be an integral part of religious life. It is important that, where reasonably practicable, the needs of students and staff from all religious backgrounds, and also of those with no religious affiliation, are met. It is also important to be clear when the needs of religious students and staff may impinge upon the needs and freedoms of others, and therefore cannot be accommodated.

1. Scope of the policy

This policy applies to all staff and students at UWE. Visitors, contractors and individuals with honorary status will also be expected to abide by this policy.

This policy supports UWE's ambition in the [2020 Strategy](#) to inclusive and global in outlook and approach. The policy follows and reinforces the religious equality provisions in UWE's [Single Equality Scheme](#), [UWE Charter](#), [Student Conduct Policy](#), and [Dignity at Work](#) policies.

The University understands that not all individuals follow their faith in the same way and so making a blanket decision as to what would be suitable for one religious group may not, in practice, be appropriate. This policy aims to provide guidance, and flexibility to respond to individual needs.

The legal instruments that relate to religion and belief equality are:

- The Equality Act 2010
- The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
- The Human Rights Act 1998.

In particular, the Equality Act 2010 places a responsibility on the University to ensure that facilities and services do not discriminate against people on the basis of religion or belief, or on the basis of a lack of religion or belief.

2. Freedom of Speech

The University believes that a culture of free and open discussion is essential in its role as an academic institution. This culture can only be achieved if all concerned behave with necessary tolerance and avoid needlessly offensive or provocative action or language. The University expects all persons taking part in its activities to respect its values, be sensitive to the diversity of its community and to show respect to all sections of that community.

The University provides a diverse environment, to encourage discussion, and embrace the critical exploration of questions concerning religion, belief and non-belief. The University expects staff, students, contractors and visitors to respect the freedom of others to express their convictions, religious beliefs or non belief in their own terms. The University will seek to intervene in instances where manifestations of a belief constitute harassment or create conflict that goes beyond open and reasoned debate (see [Section 9 Harassment](#)). The University also has a duty to protect students and staff from aggressive, manipulative or covert forms of proselytism.

Guest speakers can be invited to speak on campus within the framework set out in the University's [Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#) and where relevant should be made aware of the provisions of this policy.

3. Religious Dress

The University welcomes the diversity of appearance that people from different religious and belief backgrounds can bring. However, there may be health and safety considerations that would restrict certain modes of dress in particular contexts. In such cases, it will be necessary for the University to consult with staff/students who may be affected by a restriction to see if an appropriate compromise can be reached.

There are some additional occasions where students may be requested to remove face coverings in order to verify identity (for example at examinations, and for ID card photos). The University will ensure that such requests are handled sensitively, taking into account students' desire for privacy.

4. Food Requirements

The University habitually offers foods suitable for a range of dietary requirements, and will respond positively to requests for food that meets particular requirements (e.g. vegetarian, kosher, halal), ensuring it is labelled appropriately.

5. Leave for Religious Observance

All staff, regardless of religious or similar philosophical belief, are required to work in accordance with their contract. Requests for temporary adjustments to work arrangements will be facilitated as far as is practicable, subject to sufficient notice of religious observance requirements.

Staff practising religious or similar philosophical belief will normally be entitled to take three days of their annual leave entitlement on the dates of most significance to them. Further requests for leave entitlement to be taken at times of religious significance will be treated sympathetically. Statutory leave arrangements include Christmas and Easter, both of which are Christian religious festivals. For all staff, regardless of religious belief, the number of annual leave days overall will remain as in the contract of employment.

Staff may apply for unpaid [leave of absence](#) of up to one month on religious grounds. Such requests will be considered by the Dean or Head of Service, who will inform the member of staff of the reasons if leave is to be refused.

Individuals considering permanent adjustments to their contract of employment in order to support religious observance may make a request via the [Flexible Working Policy](#). This policy is open to all staff who have completed 26 weeks service. The policy is designed to support staff in balancing external commitments with those of work. Managers are encouraged to consider requests sympathetically; however, all applications will be assessed and considered in line with the policy.

Staff may occasionally be required to work at times outside of their usual working hours. If staff have reasons not to work at particular times because of religious observance requirements, these needs should be taken into account where possible by managers in scheduling work.

6. Religious Observance and the Academic Calendar

The University will consult with staff and students so that religious observance can be accommodated into the Academic Calendar, including scheduling of teaching and assessment, as far as is practicable.

Religious Observance and Assessment

Examination period dates are fixed and publicised in advance and are aligned with other events in the academic calendar. As such, it is not possible to change these dates in order to accommodate the full diversity of religious practices.

The University provides support for students whose religious practices may coincide with the timing of examinations or assessments taken under controlled conditions. The University's [Faith and Spirituality team](#) can advise students on how best to manage their religious commitments during this period. Students can also contact [Student Support Advisers](#) for advice on any matter that may affect their studies or assessment.

Coursework assessment (including resit coursework)

Deadlines for coursework assessment are given in advance to students. Therefore, students who are observing religious festivals around the time of the deadline will need to plan their work so it is completed in good time.

Prayers and assessment

Students are not permitted to leave a scheduled learning or assessment activity in order to pray. Students whose prayer time falls within an examination should make arrangements to fulfil their obligations to pray either before or after the examination. A student who leaves the exam room for any reason cannot return to the exam. This is in line with the code of behaviour for all examination candidates.

7. Placements

Students should be treated fairly and consistently, with dignity and respect wherever they study, or undertake placements as part of their course at UWE. Placements should also be free from undue stress, anxiety, fear and intimidation. The University will take all reasonable steps to ensure that external organisations providing placement opportunities for members of the University community have policies and procedures in place to prevent and deal with issues of bullying and harassment.

When students are on placement, they are expected to adhere to the policies and practices of their host organisation. The student should research these practices and facilities in advance before agreeing to a work placement programme.

8. Financial Support for Students

The University provides information on [financial support](#) available to students, and students can get specific advice on financial support available to them from the University's [Money Advice and Funds Service](#).

For certain Government and University Funds, students are only eligible for awards if they have already taken out their full entitlement to any statutory support available to them, including tuition fee and living cost loans, means-tested benefits and/or tax credits. This applies even if students feel unable to access repayable funding due to religious reasons (for example, if they feel it conflicts with Islamic Shariah Law).

9. Harassment

Harassment on the grounds of religion or belief can occur for a variety of reasons, for example:

- On the grounds of a person's belief or non-belief;
- On the grounds of the belief or non-belief of someone with whom they associate;
- To join or leave a particular faith;
- To express or not express their faith;
- Because they have changed or renounced their religious/belief allegiance.

UWE is committed to providing an environment that is stimulating and supportive and free of harassment, bullying and victimisation, by any person whether University employee, student or an external third party. Procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour are covered by the University's [Student Conduct Policy](#), [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#), and [Dignity at Work Policy](#).

10. Facilities and Services

The University will endeavour to provide appropriate space and facilities for prayer and religious observance at all its campuses. The Faith and Spirituality team provides information about groups and venues for prayer or worship in the local areas around each campus.

The Octagon on Frenchay Campus hosts a wide range of facilities including:

- The Lounge: Providing a drop-in social space for meeting friends and colleagues, where you can have lunch or make a drink and use computers. The Lounge can also be used for events and meetings.
- The Quiet Room: Offering a quiet space for reflection, prayer and meditation.
- The Reflection Room: Housing a small collection of reference books on faith and spirituality, and is ideal for one to one private conversations, pastoral care, spiritual direction, prayer and meditation.

Dedicated Muslim prayer rooms with washing facilities are available at Frenchay Campus for both men (brothers) (3E41) and women (sisters) (3E44A).

Regular faith group meetings and worship take place at The Octagon at various times through the week.

There is a multi-faith prayer room on Glenside Campus behind the main reception that is available for students and staff during term time between 09:30 and 16:30. A room at Bower Ashton Campus is available from 13:00 to 14:00 each day during term time for prayer and reflection; details of this can be obtained from the Information Point.

11. Networks and Support

UWE offers opportunities for students and staff to explore and practise faith and spirituality. This includes facilities and information on places for prayer and worship, space for private reflection, opportunities to meet others, and advice on spiritual and ethical concerns.

UWE's Faith and Spirituality Team is based in The Octagon on Frenchay campus. The team provides support for students and staff of all faiths or none, including:

- Space and time for worship and private reflection within the University
- Confidential personal support to anyone with pastoral or spiritual needs
- Regular events to celebrate particular expressions of Faith and Spirituality
- Advice on spiritual and ethical concerns
- Support for student and staff faith networks and groups
- Information about local faith communities
- Social events and opportunities for people to meet
- Advice and support for the institution on religious, spiritual and ethical matters

Members of the Faith and Spirituality Team, including the University Chaplain, can provide advice to students and staff on issues related to this policy. For example, students can seek advice on how to manage their religious observance through teaching, learning and assessment.

UWE Students' Union provides support for [Student Networks](#), which bring together students who share similar identities, cultures and beliefs.

For more information about support for Faith and Spirituality at UWE please see the [Faith and Spirituality website](#).

12. Faith Advisory Board

UWE has a Faith Advisory Board, with representation from the different communities which UWE's Faith and Spirituality provision seeks to serve. The Board also includes external membership, to provide objectivity and wider perspectives on religious matters. This Board does not have a formal governance role, but is able to advise the University on the direction and management of its services.

The Faith Advisory Board meets three times a year. It aims to:

- Discuss and recommend strategies for UWE's Faith and Spirituality provision, and multi-faith Chaplaincy work;
- Ensure that UWE's faith and spirituality provision is responsive to the needs of its students and staff, and provide advice and support for student and staff faith networks;
- Provide appropriate, relevant and current advice on religious matters, and the needs of different faith communities;
- Develop effective partnerships with local faith communities, which can help to support UWE students and staff;
- Promote principles of multi-faith Chaplaincy, including opportunities for dialogue and co-operation between different faiths.

13. Monitoring and Review

Monitoring of the Religion and Belief Policy will be undertaken by the University's Equality Management Group and Faith Advisory Board.

The University's Religion and Belief Policy will be reviewed not less than every three years.

14. Complaints

Staff and students who believe that they have been discriminated against or feel that they have not been treated fairly in accordance with this policy should follow regulations for [student complaints](#) or [staff grievance procedures](#).

[Approved by Academic Board on 25/06/2014]