

Religion and Belief Policy

Introduction

1. The University of Greenwich celebrates the diversity of the religious beliefs (including non-belief) among our students and staff, which adds to the richness of our campus life. While we are a secular institution with no religious or denominational affiliation, we are committed to providing a supportive and safe environment in which students and staff can engage successfully with all aspects of university life in a culture of mutual respect for everyone's religion, belief or non-belief. This includes a commitment to eliminating discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering tolerance, respect and good relations between groups, in accordance with our [Equality and Diversity Policy Statement](#).

2. The University recognises that the spiritual and moral systems that religion or belief offer can be of fundamental importance to the well-being and success of students. This policy, therefore, provides guidance to students, and those staff responsible for aspects of their education and welfare, on how the needs of students with respect to religion and belief are to be met. The policy does not intend to be comprehensive; rather it addresses some important questions that may arise in this context.

Policy Scope

3. This policy covers all students at the University of Greenwich and relates to all aspects of their studies within the University.

Definitions

4. The Equality Act 2010 defines religion or belief as "any religion and any religious or philosophical belief. It also includes a lack of any such religion or belief".

Religion means any religion and includes a lack of religion. It includes the more commonly recognised religions in the UK but a religion need not necessarily be mainstream or well-known to gain protection as a religion. However, it must have a clear structure and belief system.

Belief means any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Religious belief goes beyond beliefs about and adherence to a religion or its central articles of faith and may vary from person to person within the same religion. A belief need not include faith or worship of a God or Gods, but must affect how a person lives their life or perceives the world.

A belief which is not a religious belief may be a philosophical belief. For a philosophical belief to be protected by the Equality Act:

- It must be genuinely held.
- It must be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on information available at the moment.
- It must be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour.
- It must attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance.
- It must be worthy of respect in a democratic society. It must be compatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others.

5. In defining what is reasonable, the University of Greenwich seeks to balance the religion or belief needs of a student with the legitimate needs of the University and the interests of others. Wherever possible, the University will explore a flexible approach for students to facilitate faith practice. As some agreed flexibilities will take time to be arranged, both staff and students should allow a reasonable timeframe for these to be discussed and agreed.

6. To reach a fully considered, balanced, and reasonable conclusion, the University should consider, amongst other factors:

- the cost, disruption and wider impact on business or work if the request is accommodated
- whether there are health and safety implications for the proposed change
- the disadvantage to the affected student if the request is refused
- the impact of any change on other employees or students, including on those who have a different religion or belief, or no religion or belief

Academic Freedom and Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion

7. The University of Greenwich is an academic institution that places high value on open and reasoned debate. The University recognises the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion¹. These rights are absolute but manifestations of these beliefs are not. The right to manifest a belief may be qualified by the need to show respect for the differing worldviews, lifestyles and identities of others. The University has an over-arching responsibility to promote pluralism and tolerance and will seek to intervene in instances where manifestations of a belief constitute harassment or create conflict that goes beyond open and reasoned debate.

Timetabling

8. The University must ensure that timetables operate efficiently and effectively to deliver learning, teaching and assessment requirements within the available space and time. For these reasons, the timetable cannot accommodate the diversity of religious observance requirements on campus. The University understands that there may be certain occasions when a student may be absent due to religious observance. It is expected that this will not be a common or regular occurrence.

9. For the same reasons, the University is unable to agree to changes to students' timetables on the basis of religious observance.

Assessments

10. The University will normally only permit claims for Extenuating Circumstances for assessments where the student can evidence that the observance of a religious event has impacted on their ability to undertake an assessment to the scheduled deadline. This information should be read with the information available with regards to submitting successful claims for ECs found [here](#).

Gender Segregation and Study

11. The University does not permit gender segregation in learning and teaching activities. It does recognise that there are exceptions such as positive action schemes which are specifically designed to address inequalities.

¹ See the University's [Freedom of Expression Code of Practice](#) for our commitment to freedom of expression and how we ensure freedom of speech within the law.

Religious Clothing and Study

12. The University welcomes the diversity of different attire worn by its students. In particular situations some students will not be able to wear certain religious clothing due to health and safety considerations and/or to the need for communication between individuals. This may especially apply, for example, in medical and laboratory-based disciplines. In order to comply with health and safety regulations, specific items of clothing such as overalls, protective clothing etc. may also need to be worn. The need to comply with health and safety regulations will be given priority over the need for religious expression. Any religious attire or accoutrements must be compliant with English law.

13. In the interests of safety and security, students are required to have a University issued photographic ID and to produce it when required for identification purposes. The photo ID must show the student's face with any facial covering removed.

14. The University requires proof of identity for all students entering an examination venue. This is done by carrying out a visual check against photographic ID issued by the University. In order to verify the identity of individual female students with a facial covering, the University will endeavour as far as reasonably possible to make available a female member of staff (including invigilators) to perform this check in a private area.

Work Placements and Internships

15. When students are on work placements or internships, they are expected to adhere to the policies and practices of their host organisation. The onus is on the student to research these practices and facilities in advance before agreeing to a work placement or internship. If a student has any concerns, these should be brought to the attention of their course leader at the earliest opportunity.

Student Environment

16. University owned student accommodation: shared kitchen facilities in most university student accommodation offer adequate facilities for specific dietary needs and food preparation. The University does not have designated single sex flats. Students self-select their accommodation and will be able to view the gender of other students booked into available flats. Some flats may be single sex accommodation by default, but it cannot be guaranteed that this position will remain the same across the academic year should vacancies become available.

17. [Accommodation Services](#) staff can offer advice and support to students before and after taking up residence about their housing options and any concerns students may have pertaining to the accommodation.

18. Dedicated multi-faith and contemplation space: students can pray or engage in quiet reflection or meditation in the multi-faith faith spaces provided by the University, the use of which must be in accordance with the principles agreed for the use of the faith spaces. To avoid disturbing other students or University activities, organised worship should only take place in areas where it has been permitted by the University or the [Greenwich Students' Union](#). Booking requests should indicate clearly that the booking is for the purposes of organised worship.

19. Food and drink: the University has outlets which sell a variety of food options. Most of these outlets have vegetarian and vegan options. Events organised by the University will have vegetarian options when food is provided. Some events serve alcohol but there will always be non-alcoholic

drinks provided. To enable students to make informed decisions about what they eat, food should be labelled clearly to indicate where it may be suitable for special dietary needs, including whether it has been prepared in accordance with any specific religious requirements. During preparation and storage meat should be kept separate from vegetarian food. Any food which is intended to meet religious requirements should be prepared and stored in accordance with those requirements.

20. Pastoral support: the University's [chaplains](#) are appointed by faith communities and recognised by the university to work at the University to care for students and staff of all religions and beliefs, and also for those who do not have a faith background. There are chaplains based at Medway, Avery Hill and Greenwich campuses. Our chaplains provide pastoral care to those in distress or need as part of our strategy to support student wellbeing.

21. Promoting good relations between groups: we have established a Faith Forum to promote dialogue between the University, student faith societies and the [Greenwich Students' Union](#) on the University's policies towards and provision for religion and belief. Student faith societies operate within the framework of support for student societies provided by the Greenwich Students' Union.

Discrimination on the grounds of Religion or Belief

22. The University will take firm action where anyone uses language, treatment or behaviour which discriminates against any other person on the grounds of their religion, belief or lack of religion or belief. Students should first speak to their Personal Tutor/Research Supervisor and may wish to have their complaint formally dealt with through the [Student Disciplinary Procedure](#) or the [Bullying and Harassment Policy](#) as appropriate.

23. Religion, belief or lack of religion or belief will not be used to justify discriminatory or otherwise inappropriate or unlawful behaviour which may be in contravention of the University's expected standards of conduct. Instances of this will be dealt with through the Student Disciplinary Procedure or the Bullying and Harassment Policy as appropriate.

Approved by the Academic Council: 23 June 2021

Policy owner: University Secretary

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