

Code of practice for supporting students relating to religion, belief and teaching and learning

General Statement

- 1 The University will not unlawfully discriminate directly or indirectly against any applicant, student, employee, supplier, provider, contractor or user of facilities on the basis of their religion or belief, perceived religion or belief (i.e. the assumption of an religion and belief which may in fact be a false assumption) or the association with someone of a particular religious or philosophical belief.
- 2 The University opposes any form of discrimination on these stated grounds unless it can be objectively justified within the law. In particular it will not apply a criterion, provision or practice, which disadvantages people of a particular religion or belief

grievance and disciplinary procedures and student complaints and disciplinary procedures.

Implementation of this policy

- 6 The University will take such steps as are reasonable and practicable to ensure that no member (or potential member) of the University is put at a disadvantage because of their religion or belief. Where an individual has religious or other beliefs which conflict with their normal obligations to the University, alternative strategies and/or arrangements should be considered in consultation with the individual concerned, in so far as such alternatives are reasonable and practicable, so that the individual is neither advantaged nor disadvantaged. In particular we shall allow a student whose religion or beliefs require their absence from an academic activity at a specific time to perform this activity at another time, where this is reasonable and practicable, or make alternative arrangements as appropriate.
- 7 activity at any time and the activity is a minor part of a module or programme we shall attempt to provide an alternative activity or, failing that, adjust any assessment or other arrangements so that the student is neither advantaged nor disadvantaged in comparison to his or her peers.
- 8 efs prevent their taking part will form a major part of a module or programme, or may be a key theory, technique or principle of the discipline concerned, and it may not be possible to make alternative arrangements without compromising the academic integrity of the programme or module. For example, the theory of evolution is central to certain academic disciplines and those obtaining a qualification in the discipline may be expected to know the theory, even though their religious beliefs may be at odds with such theory. Students studying such disciplines may be expected to study the topic in a similar way that one may study religions whose beliefs one does not hold. Activities whose study cannot be excused are likely to be those which are specified in the learning outcomes of the module or programme or which lead to these learning outcomes. Students who have doubts about their being able to undertake activities related to the learning outcomes of their programme or module on the basis of their religion or belief should raise the matter with their Programme Director at the earliest opportunity.
- 9 What is reasonable and practicable will vary on a case by case basis. Not all requests will necessarily be able to be accommodated for good reason but the University undertakes that all requests will be viewed sympathetically and every reasonable effort made to come to a workable arrangement.
- 10 Any student who considers that s/he has not been treated in accordance with this policy should in the first instance raise their concerns with their Director of Teaching and Learning or Academic Tutor.
- 11 If this approach is not successful, the complainant can also contact the Student Advice n be taken this would be in line with the Student Complaints Procedures.

Procedural Notes

What does the law say?

- 12 The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful for the University to discriminate against its staff or students on the grounds of religion or belief.
- 13 The Act applies widely to "any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief" and may apply to a philosophical or political belief if that belief has a similar status and cogency as

**Please note that these examples do not represent an exhaustive list and that issues may arise in the context of other religions or beliefs which are not explicitly mentioned here (e.g. Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhist etc).*

Please also note that issues can also arise for Academic staff of a particular religion or belief and not just students.

How should I approach such situations?

- 16 In a T&L context most potential issues fall into the category of indirect discrimination, where the litmus test in terms good practice would be:

*Are you are doing everything which is **reasonable** and **practicable** to ensure that this student isn't put at a disadvantage because of his or her religion or belief? Can your decision to accommodate or refuse a request be objectively justified?*

- 17 Alternative strategies should be considered **in consultation** with the individual student, with a view to removing or minimising any potential disadvantage in so far as possible. What is **reasonable** and **practicable** will vary on a case by case basis. When looking at specifics it would be impossible to guarantee total consistency and equity when dealing with issues of religion and belief. However, the University must guarantee consistency in the spirit by which the request for an adjustment on the grounds of religion or belief is received in a T&L context. Not all requests will necessarily be able to be accommodated. The key is that all requests should be viewed sympathetically and every reasonable effort made to come to a workable arrangement, and where this is not possible, there should be clear and justifiable reasons.

How can I know when certain religious festivals are taking place?

- 18 A good resource for this is a multi-faith calendar available on the BBC website. This calendar is available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/> and shows religious festivals and celebrations of eight world faiths.
- 19 The calendar is accurate, but please note that some dates may vary regionally because they are determined by the lunar calendar.
- 20 Whilst staff should be sensitive to the multi-faith calendar, staff should not make an environment where individuals feel able to discuss any concerns, in the knowledge that they will not be penalised and that steps will be taken if possible to accommodate them.