

Religion and Belief Policy

for Students and Staff

1. INTRODUCTION

As part of our core commitment to promoting equality and diversity, we aim to provide an inclusive learning, living and working environment where students and staff of all religions or beliefs, as well as those who subscribe to a no belief system, feel safe and supported. This policy outlines expected behaviour for all members of the community regardless of religion, belief or non-belief.

1.1 Purpose

We seek to ensure that:

- Individuals are not treated less favourably than others because of their actual or perceived religion, belief or non-belief;
- Policies, practices and provisions are based on relevant criteria, which do not discriminate on grounds of religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief or non-belief (except in the case of a genuine occupational requirement);
- Policies, practices and provisions do not put people of any specific religion or belief or non-belief at an unfair disadvantage when compared to other persons;
- Discrimination on the basis of another person's religion, belief or non-belief will not be tolerated;
- All members of the Keele community will be treated with dignity, respect and fairness whatever their religious and/or other beliefs may or may not be;
- Where possible, dedicated support and services are provided to meet the cultural and religious needs of staff and students;
- Opportunities to foster good relations between different faith groups and those of no faith are explored.

We recognise that the spiritual and moral systems that religions and beliefs offer can often be of fundamental importance to the wellbeing of students and staff. Rituals, such as dress, diet and prayer, can be an integral part of religious everyday 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 recognise that, should the needs of religious students or staff impinge upon the needs and freedoms of others, it may not be possible to accommodate the needs of the religious student or staff member.

The right to religious freedom means that members of our community should not be forced to act or be restrained from acting in accordance with their convictions in religious matters. This includes the right to discuss religion or religious practice. It is recognised that members of our community who celebrate a particular faith will seek to give external expression to their faith. We do not seek to restrict religious activity but rather to provide a means, as described below, for its expression.

However, while giving expression to their belief individually or in association with others, all should be aware that others may hold different belief system which should be respected.

1.2 Scope

This policy applies to members of the Keele Community to include students and staff in addition to the wider Keele community such as visitors, contractors and individuals with honorary/visiting status.

2. POLICY

2.1 Definitions

Religion or belief is legally defined as:

- a) 'any religious belief, provided the religion has a clear structure or belief system'.
Denominations or sects within a religion can be considered a protected religion or religious belief.
- b) a philosophical belief, for example humanism, atheism, pacifism

For the purpose 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 churches, mosques, synagogues, temples or gurdwaras.

The University has a legal responsibility to protect individuals with one or more of the nine characteristics from harassment, bullying and victimisation. The Equality Act 2010 does not offer any protected characteristic with higher priority than any other.

While staff and students have the right not to be discriminated against because of religion or belief, we legitimately require that individuals do not behave in a way that breaches the dignity and respect of other individuals. As employees and students, we expect our staff and students to deliver services in a non-discriminatory manner. Refusal to deliver services to a protected group will be deemed unacceptable behaviour and appropriate disciplinary action may be taken.

3.0 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Freedom of Speech

We believe that a culture of free speech, 'to enable members of the community to engage in discourse', is essential in its role as an academic institution. We expect everyone taking part in its activities to respect its values, be sensitive to the diversity of its community and to show respect to all members of that community.

Our [Freedom of Speech Code of Practice](#) intended to ensure compliance with legal requirements, including the Prevent duty guidance and the duty to ensure freedom of speech within the law for students, staff and visiting speakers using the University's premises. This is supported by the procedures for the approval of student events (operated in conjunction with KeeleSU) and the [Speaker Approval Procedure](#) for the monitoring of staff and externally booked events.

3.2 Objections to Aspects of Duties/Studies

Both staff and students may be required at times to participate in activities and/or research which an individual may object to on grounds of religious or philosophical belief. In such instances individuals should raise their concerns with their line manager/tutor in the first instance and at the earliest opportunity. Every effort will be made to reorganise duties/studies to accommodate where possible the needs of the individual whilst balancing the needs of the service, other policies, regulations and other staff/students.

3.3 Dress

We welcome the diversity of appearance that people from different religious and belief backgrounds bring. It is therefore appropriate and a welcome part of our wish to express cultural diversity on campus for people to wear religious dress or culturally affiliated dress (including for example sari, turban, skullcap, hijab, kippah, manual sutra or clerical collars). 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 affected staff/students to see if an appropriate compromise can be reached.

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

For staff or students who will be located for work or study in clinical, laboratory spaces, field trips or workshops where particular rules or dress codes including health and safety, must be complied with the requirements of the study requirements.

Staff and students undertaking placements/secondments may be required to follow specific dress requirements of the hosting organisation, for example, particularly within healthcare environments subject to infection control, health and safety and patient communication policies. Please refer to specific academic school procedures on individual School websites for further information.

In cases of dispute or concern for health and safety implications about a particular form of dress, the Department of Occupational Health and Safety will advise.

The wearing of slogans and symbols which incite hatred of a person's religious belief or absence of belief will constitute a breach of this policy and may result in disciplinary action.

3.4 Religious Observance

All staff, regardless of religious or philosophical belief, are required to work in accordance with their contract. Certain working patterns may require working at certain times in order to ensure service provision is maintained.

Requests for temporary adjustments to work arrangements due to religious observance will be facilitated as far as is practicable, subject to sufficient notice. Individuals may also wish to consider permanent adjustments to their contract of employment in order to support religious observance.

In both circumstances staff should contact their line manager and HR to discuss requirements, and in

some circumstances, use the [Flexible Working Policy](#). Managers are encouraged to consider requests sympathetically and all applications will be assessed and considered in line with the Flexible Working Policy.

Staff practicing religious or philosophical beliefs may wish to take annual leave on the dates of most significance to them and may request to use their annual leave allowance on such dates. Managers are encouraged to consider such requests sympathetically and all annual leave requests will be assessed and considered in line with the [Annual Leave 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 raised with their line manager at the earliest opportunity and should be taken into account where possible by managers in scheduling work.

Any member of the Keele Community is entitled to observe the traditions of their religion, for example, to pray at certain times of day. If this takes place during the working day or study periods, appropriate arrangements must be made with their line manager or tutor. It should be noted that any such arrangements must consider the effects this may have on others to ensure that any effect is mitigated.

Any concerns about the provision of staff time off to participate in religious festivals or to pray should be addressed to the Link Officer in Human Resources who can offer further advice and support.

3.5 Examinations and Assessment

As far as practicable, we will consult with both staff and students so that religious observance can be accommodated into the academic calendar, including scheduling of teaching and examinations.

The assessment and 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.

We will provide advice and support for students whose religious practices may coincide with the timing of examinations or assessments taken under controlled conditions. Keele Chaplains and Faith Advisers can advise how best to manage religious commitments during this period. The Student Services Centre is also available for advice on any matter that may affect their studies or assessment.

Any student unable to attend examinations on a Sabbath, holy day or religious festival should complete a [Religious Observance Form](#) or speak with a member of the Examinations team within [Student Administration](#). Any missed learning opportunities as a result of participation of religious festivals will be expected to be made up in the students time.

Every effort will be made to avoid arranging examinations on a Sabbath or holy day for those students who have informed the examinations office as required, however due to the large number of examinations it may not always be possible to avoid these dates/times. The University, therefore, reserves the right to hold examinations on such days if no alternative time is convenient. In such cases arrangements for the student to sit their examination in an alternative venue will be made where possible. Any student who leaves an examination to perform religious observance will be accompanied by an invigilator. Any time taken away from the examination venue will be added back

onto the end of the examination.

Deadlines for coursework assessment are communicated in advance to students. All students will be expected to plan their work to be completed by the deadline and comply with [Regulation D1](#) in relation to assessment and examinations.

3.6 Placements and Global Education Exchange

Students should be treated fairly and consistently, with dignity and respect wherever they study, or undertake placements as part of their course at Keele. Placements should also be free from undue stress, anxiety, fear and intimidation. We 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.

All students on placement are expected to adhere to the policies and practices of the host organisation. Practices and facilities of the host organisation should be researched in advance of the work placement/programme before engaging in a their placement activity.

3.7 Harassment

We are committed to providing a safe and welcoming environment within which all staff and students can flourish and achieve their potential, and which is free from bullying and harassment. Harassment is unwanted behaviour which you find offensive or which makes you feel intimidated or humiliated. It can happen on its own or alongside other forms of discrimination. A [hate crime](#) is defined as a criminal offence committed against a person or their property. For further information see the [weblink](#).

All students and staff are expected to:

- conduct themselves in a manner which demonstrates respect for University staff, students and members of the University;
- act in line with Regulation B1 [Student Discipline](#) & [Staff Discipline Procedure](#), which governs expectations of conduct;
- ensure that you comply with any professionalism and confidentiality codes of conduct for your particular study discipline or research area. For example, Health Sciences, Social Work, Education, Medical and Veterinary students must retain professionalism and respect confidentiality;

3.8 External Religious Groups

It should be noted that the campus is private property and there is no automatic right of access to members of the public.

Any external religious groups wishing to come onto campus¹ must, in the first instance, have obtained the appropriate checks on their staff or volunteers, in line with the Disclosure and Barring Service requirements and our [Speaker Approval procedure](#). Student faith societies should adhere to KeeleSU codes and policies when organising a student faith activity/event. In this instance, any external speakers may be invited by these societies is also subject the External Approval procedure.

¹ This procedure is not applicable to private dwellings on Keele campus.

3.9 [Faith Spaces](#)

We endeavor to provide appropriate space and facilities for prayer and religious observance. We have places on campus set aside for groups or individuals to worship, pray, meditate or reflect, and all students and staff are very welcome to make use of them. Campus facilities include: The Chapel, The East Chapel which is available for private prayer for all faiths and non-faiths, The Islamic Centre and the Remembrance Garden. These spaces have a variety of uses including prayer, meditation, reflection, social activity and practical purposes such as food preparation. See [link](#):

Oversight of the Islamic Centre is provided by a dual committee structure, namely, the Islamic Centre Committee (ICC), to consider worship-related matters and to provide a forum for users, including the student voice, and an Islamic Centre Building Management Committee, with representation from Estates and Development, Chaplaincy, Student Services and the ICC.

Keele Chapel is managed by a Committee who are elected annually from within the chapel community, this includes a senior member of University finance staff who acts as treasurer. Chaplains are *ex officio* members of Chapel Committee. The Chaplaincy Management Group has a broader oversight who, together with the Director of Student Services, manage The Chaplaincy Team. The Chaplains' Management Group consists of a senior member of the denomination of each of the three Christian Chaplains (drawn from outside the University), a senior member of the University, the two non-student representatives to Chapel Committee, and the Chaplains.

3.10 Pastoral/Spiritual Support

Keele 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.

Keele's Chaplaincy 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 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*

In addition to Chaplains, Faith Advisors offer more specific knowledge and expertise from a particular faith. Faith Advisors may also offer basic pastoral support to a specific faith community. Members of the Chaplaincy Team, or Faith Advisors', can provide opportunities for faith groups to meet and discuss faith issues. In addition, the Chaplains and Faith Advisors can provide advice to students and staff on issues related to this policy, for example, advice on how to manage their religious observance in regard to teaching, learning and assessment.

[Keele SU](#) provides support for student networks and societies, which bring together students who share similar identities, cultures and beliefs.

3.11 Practical Considerations

The following are some practical implications of this policy.

- a) **Keele Community campus** - It should be noted that Keele Campus includes private residential homes, rented accommodation, student accommodation and teaching/working space.
- b) **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 type of event catered, 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 meeting religious dietary requirements will be provided.
- c) **Drink** – There should always be water available for all catered events. Alcohol can be provided where appropriate, but should be served separately. Students and staff should be aware of the policies and guidance relating to [staff](#) and [students](#).
- d) **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.
- e) **Examinations** – Examinations should be timetabled to avoid, wherever possible, recognised religious celebrations, festivals or ceremonies and key prayer times.
- f) **Open days** – Open and Offer Holder days should take account of the impact of religious festivals and major festival dates should be avoided wherever possible.
- g) **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 of interviews/ selection exercises altered on the grounds of religion should be treated sympathetically and rescheduled where possible. Particular attention should be paid to the timings of overnight stays and facilities provided.
- h) **Lectures and staff development opportunities** – All learning opportunities should be inclusive. The timing of staff development opportunities or conferences should, as far as practical, take into account religious celebrations, festivals or ceremonies.
- i) **Missed learning opportunities** – Any learning opportunities missed as a result of participation in a religious festival must be completed in the students own time. 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, (see [regulation D1](#)).

4.0 RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

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

- [Appeals procedure](#)
- [Dignity and Respect Framework](#)

- [Equality Diversity and Inclusion Strategy](#)
- [Examinations Code of Practice](#)
- [External Speaker Approval Procedure](#)
- [Freedom of Speech Code of Practice](#)
- [Grievance Procedures for Staff](#)
- [Learning and Teaching Strategy](#)
- [Regulation D1: Assessment](#)
- [Safeguarding Policy](#)
- [Student Agreement](#)
- [Student Complaints](#)
- [Student Discipline](#)
- [University Charter](#)

We understand 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.

4.2 This policy aims to provide guidance as well as flexibility to respond to individual needs.

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

- Data Protection Act (1998) & General Data Protection Regulations 2018
- Higher Education and Research Act 2017
- The Equality Act 2010
- The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
- The Terrorism Act 2000
- European Convention on Human Rights
- Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- The Human Rights Act 1998
- Protection from Harassment (NI) Order 1997
- Health & Safety at Work (NI) Order 1997
- Obscene Publications Act 1994

The Equality Act 2010 provides protection from discrimination for nine protected characteristics. Belief is defined under the Equality Act as any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief.

The Act covers both the employment of staff and the admission and treatment of students including teaching methods, delivery and assessment. Other areas covered by the Act include the provision of services, goods and facilities such as careers, libraries, childcare services and conferences, premises and recreational or training facilities. The Act prohibits discrimination based on religion, belief or non-belief, perceived religion, belief or non-belief and discrimination on the basis of an association of a religion, belief or non-belief.

As an institution of higher education we also commit to the core values of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#), which states that '[Education] shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups...' and 'shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures... secure their universal and effective recognition and observance.'

The Higher Education and Research Act 2017 establishes that staff are free to 'question and test

received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at the provider' (see section 14(7)). The European Convention on Human Rights states that 'everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority' (see Article 10(1)), a view upheld and extended in the 1976 European Court of Human Rights ruling that '[freedom of expression] is applicable not only to "information" or "ideas" that are favourably received or regarded as inoffensive or as a matter of indifference, but also to those that offend, shock or disturb the State or any sector of the population. The European Convention on Human Rights also states 'freedom of expression does not protect statements that discriminate against or harass, or incite violence or hatred against, other persons and groups, particularly by reference to their race, religious belief, gender or sexual orientation'.

Keele is therefore committed not only to protecting its staff and students from discrimination but to taking progressive measures to actively advance understanding and mutual understanding.

4.3 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](#), [Bullying and harassment Policy and procedure](#), [Staff Grievance procedures](#) and The Complaints procedure of the [Student's Union](#)

5.0 Review, Approval and Publication

Monitoring of the Religion and Belief Policy will be undertaken by the Keele Communities Together and Chaplaincy Management Group and will be reviewed not less than every three years and will be reported through Senate Committee.

6.0 Document Control Information

Document Name	Religion and Belief Policy for Students & Staff
Owner	Student Services
Version Number	0.2
Equality Analysis Decision and Date	April 2019
Approval Date	
Approved By	
Date of Commencement	
Date of Last Review	
Date for Next Review	
Related University Policy Documents	
<i>For Office Use – Keywords for search function</i>	

[Include page numbers on all University Policy Documents within the footer; also include the University logo, compliant with the current brand templates]

