

POLICY ON RELIGION OR BELIEF¹

1. Policy Statement

1.1 Statement of Intent

The University of Bolton celebrates and values the diversity of its community and aims to create a harmonious working and learning environment where the cultural, religious and non-religious beliefs of all members of the University are respected. The University recognises the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, but the right to manifest beliefs is qualified by the need to protect the rights and freedoms of others. This policy aims to ensure equal treatment for everyone, of any religion or none. It is based on the principle that people have the right to their own belief system; however, they have no right to impose their views on others.

Through the implementation of the relevant policies and procedures the University seeks to ensure that:

- Recruitment and selection is based entirely on relevant criteria, which do not include religious belief or non-belief (except in the case of a genuine occupational qualification);
- Members of any religion or none are treated with equal dignity and fairness;
- Under-represented groups in HE are encouraged to join the University community;
- Where reasonably practicable, appropriate facilities and services² are provided to meet the religious needs of staff and students.

The University of Bolton does not have any religious affiliation and does not endorse any particular denomination or faith.

1.2 Dress Code

The University of Bolton imposes no dress code on its members and welcomes the variety of appearance brought by individual styles and choices of dress. The wearing of items arising from particular religious beliefs or cultural practices³ is seen as part of this welcome diversity.

¹ In this policy, 'religion or belief' means any religion, religious belief, or similar philosophical belief

² 'Services' in this policy refers to facilities and not religious services.

³ For example, clerical collars, cross, crucifix, hijabs, kippah, mangalsutra, sari, turbans.

The only exceptions are as follows:

- Health and safety requirements may mean that for certain activities specific items of clothing such as overalls, protective clothing, etc. need to be worn. If such clothing produces a conflict with an individual's religious beliefs, the issue will be considered sympathetically by
 - (i) the line manager in the case of a member of staff, or
 - (ii) the academic supervisor in the case of a student, with the assistance of the University Health and Safety Advisor with the aim of finding an appropriate solution.
- Wearing slogans or symbols, for example t-shirts or badges, which are discriminatory (e.g. racist or sexist) or offensive is forbidden and disciplinary action may be taken.
- Students undertaking an internship or placement with an external organisation are expected to observe any dress code required by the provider of the internship and placement;

Where there is a need to check the identity of a member of staff or student e.g. for University or external examination procedures or for reasons of security, verification will be carried out sensitively and by appropriate staff.

1.3 Religious Observance

The University will make reasonable efforts to provide suitable space for prayer, quiet contemplation and ablution where practical. In some cases individuals' requirements will be met by facilities in the neighbourhood. The University will provide information about the facilities which are provided at the University and in the neighbourhood. Students on work placement or exchange programmes may not have access to the same level of prayer facilities.

When scheduling any University activity, consideration should be given to the impact that the proposed date or time will have in relation to the religious beliefs of staff and students.

Staff

All staff, regardless of religious belief or non-belief, are required to work in accordance with their contract of employment. However, there is likely to be some flexibility over how the hours are worked. Line managers should take into account the needs of those whose religion requires them to pray at certain times of the day. In addition, staff who require, for example an extra hour at midday on Friday, or not to work beyond sunset on Friday or not work on Saturday, or on Sunday, should be accommodated if practicable.

Students

The University will endeavour to bear in mind religious observance requirements in timetabling learning and assessment activities. However, the University must ensure that timetables operate efficiently and effectively to deliver the teaching, learning and assessment requirements of programmes within the available time and space. The University will seek to avoid as far as is practicable the timetabling of examinations during the midday period on Fridays (12 noon to 2 pm).

1.4 Leave for religious festivals⁴

In common with other UK HEIs, the University closes around the Christian religious festivals at Christmas and Easter. Staff practising other religions, or holding other beliefs, may request to take their holiday entitlement on the dates of most significance to them; such requests will not be unreasonably refused. For all staff, regardless of any religious or other belief, the number of annual days overall will remain as set out in the contract of employment⁵.

Students wishing to observe religious holidays that do not coincide with University holidays should make a formal request to their personal or academic tutor for leave of absence. While these requests will not be unreasonably refused, it is the responsibility of the student to catch up on any work missed and, in consultation with academic staff, to rearrange deadlines for coursework.

1.5 Extended leave

Staff

Staff may request extended leave at a particular time for the purpose of religious observance e.g. going on pilgrimage. Staff with relatives abroad may have particular religious or cultural needs for occasional extended leave for births, weddings, deaths. If a member of staff requests extended leave, their line manager should attempt to accommodate the request where practicable. If the extended leave exceeds the annual leave entitlement, the excess days will be unpaid and will only be granted at the line manager in consultation with Head of Personnel and Organisational Development.

⁴ Information about the main religious festivals can be found on the BBC website at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/calendar>, and on a weekly basis in the Staff Weekly bulletin

⁵ The University may require employees to take some of their leave entitlement at particular times of the year, e.g. when the University is closed between Christmas and New Year.

Students

Students wishing to take extended leave of absence from the University for the purposes of religious or cultural observance, should make a formal request to their personal or academic tutor. All requests should be made within a reasonable timeframe to ensure that appropriate arrangements can be made to either manage the absence or formally suspend studies. It is the responsibility of students to inform their sponsor and to check the financial implications of any decision to take extended leave of absence.

1.6 Dietary requirements

The University will endeavour to provide food that meets staff and students' dietary requirements. There should always be water and soft drinks provided for all catered events and where alcohol is provided, it should be served separately.

1.7 Implementation and Responsibilities

- All managers and academic staff are required to familiarise themselves with this policy, and to follow it in matters such as requests for leave of absence, exam timetabling, etc.
- All individual staff and student members of the University are responsible for familiarising themselves with this policy, for informing appropriate staff of their particular requirements and for making up any time lost as a result of religious and/or cultural observance where necessary.
- All visitors and contractors have a responsibility not to discriminate against staff or student members of the University on the grounds of religion or belief.
- Any member of staff or student who feels that that they have not been treated fairly in accordance with this policy should first try to resolve the matter by discussion with their academic or personal tutor (students) or line manager (staff), and if that fails, to use the Complaints Procedure (students) or the Grievance Procedure (staff).

2. Policy Scope

This Policy implements the requirements of the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 which became law in the UK with effect from 2 December 2003. The Regulations make it unlawful to discriminate on grounds of religion or belief in employment and vocational training, which explicitly includes institutions of further and higher education. The Regulations make the following unlawful on the grounds of religion or belief:

- Direct discrimination – treating people less favourably on grounds of religion or belief;
- Indirect discrimination – applying a provision, criterion or practice which disadvantages people of a particular religion or belief which is not justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim;
- Victimisation – treating a person less favourably because they have made a complaint of discrimination, or are thought to have done so; or because they have supported someone else who has made a complaint of discrimination;
- Harassment – unwanted conduct that violates a person’s dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment having regard to all the circumstances and the perception of the victim;
- Discrimination after relationships (as an employee or student) have ended.

This Policy applies to all staff and students of the University working or studying in the UK. The University recognises that staff and students working and studying outside of the UK are required to comply with laws of country in which they are located. Where there is a conflict between this policy and local laws and regulations, local laws will take precedence. The University will endeavour to identify any such conflict during the approval process for new overseas collaborative arrangements and advise staff and students accordingly.

3. Other Related Policies and Procedures

Diversity Charter
 Equal Opportunities Policy
 Dignity and Respect at Work and in Learning and Study Policy
 Dignity and Respect at Work Procedure
 Dignity and Respect in Learning and Study Procedure
 Student Disciplinary Procedure
 Student Complaints Procedure
 Staff Disciplinary Procedure
 Staff Grievance Procedure

4. Location, Access and Dissemination of the Policy

4.1 Location and Access

This Policy is available on the University’s website, and in alternative formats on request from Student Services.

4.2 Dissemination

This Policy will be disseminated by way of a leaflet which will be sent to all staff and made available to students in the Student Centre and in the Students' Union.

The Chaplaincy, including the Co-ordinating Chaplain and voluntary chaplains, and Vice Chancellor's Advisory Group on Faith and Spirituality Group are a source of expert advice on matters relating to religion and belief. Staff are encouraged to make full use of the expertise available before making decisions relating to this Policy.

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Document History (e.g. rationale for and dates of previous amendments)	

Note that this policy is current as at the date of issue. However, the University reserves the right to make such changes as may be required in the future – the Controlled Copy will reflect the latest issue.