Religion and Belief Equality Policy

Policy Statement

The University of Exeter is dedicated to enhancing the student experience by promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) across its diverse student community. With this in mind, the university recognises that religion and belief are not necessarily indicative of ethnicity or culture and that different religious traditions have their unique doctrines, values, and customs.

Equal treatment means providing all individuals with equal opportunities and protecting them against discrimination. Diversity refers to acknowledging, appreciating, and valuing differences among people. Therefore, the university is committed to fostering an inclusive environment that respects all forms of religious expression, expressions of the absence of belief and promotes mutual understanding and tolerance.

The university upholds the right to religious freedom, which means that no one should be coerced into acting against their convictions or prevented from acting in accordance with them, whether in private or public or in association with others. The objective of this policy document is to provide clear and transparent guidance on how teaching and assessment practices can accommodate the requirements of our student community in terms of their religious and belief-related needs.

The university recognises that students and staff who identify with a particular belief may wish to express it externally, and it strives to provide a respectful environment for such expression. All members of the university community, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds, are expected to respect the human rights of others. While expressing their beliefs individually or collectively, individuals are expected to display sensitivity and respect for others.

This link (https://www.exeter.ac.uk/departments/inclusion/support/faith/) provides an overview of the definitions of religion and belief and what falls under this policy.

1. **INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT**

    a. This policy document recognises the fundamental importance of spiritual and religious beliefs in students' lives, particularly for promoting well-being and a sense of community kinship. Indeed, upon joining the university, students have the option of joining and/or forming faith-based societies via the Students' Guild at Exeter, and the Falmouth and Exeter Students' Union at Cornwall.

    b. Religion and belief, or a lack thereof, is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The University of Exeter does not tolerate any form of discrimination or harassment associated with religious identity or practice (or lack of religious affiliation). Any behaviour that is intimidating, hostile, degrading, or humiliating towards a staff member or fellow student because of their beliefs or religious practices, or assumptions about them, is considered harassment. This behaviour will be cause for disciplinary action.

c. This policy recognises that religious practices and rituals, such as dress and prayer, and commitments like festivals and holidays, are important aspects of religious life that cannot always be optional. Therefore, our guidance is designed to assist students in practising their religious or spiritual activities in a way that does not negatively affect their and other's academic pursuits.

d. The University of Exeter strives to meet the needs of all students, regardless of their religious background or lack thereof.

e. The freedom to practice deeply held faith as a member of the University of Exeter community is fundamental to experiencing a sense of belonging to the community. The religious calendar adopted by the EDI team as agreed by the Faith and Worldview Equality Group is the Interfaith Network calendar and those officially marked by the university can be found here: Calendar | Equality, Diversity and Inclusion | University of Exeter

f. In all teaching and learning environments, the language, case studies and examples related to religion and belief must be inclusive, as should the types of case studies and examples relied upon.

2. **DRESS**

a. If students must study in clinical or laboratory spaces or workshops, particular rules or dress codes may apply, and these must be complied with, as the health and safety of members of the University community are the priority consideration. All efforts will be made to provide alternatives or make reasonable adjustments where possible if a person is required not to wear a particular aspect of their chosen dress. Staff working with students will have a compassionate approach while implementing suitable alternatives.

b. Students should discuss any issues with dress codes for placements and field trips with their university supervisor as it may be possible to provide alternatives or make reasonable adjustments. Supervisors should contact the EDI team (edi@exeter.ac.uk) if they need any assistance in this matter.

3. **FACILITIES**

a. Facilities for prayer, reflection, and quiet contemplation on all campuses are provided for students as follows:
     i. Streatham and St Luke's campuses faith facility policy: https://www.exeter.ac.uk/students/chaplaincy/policies/faithfacilities/.
     ii. Penryn and Truro campuses facilities: https://fxplus.ac.uk/student-support/multifaith-chaplaincy/.

b. In the spirit of embracing diversity, the University recognises that some faith groups may require prayers at specific times and in certain conditions such as the formal separation of male and female prayer areas by a curtain or a quiet space. This is accommodated by the University on its campuses wherever possible.

c. In certain circumstances, faith groups may wish to request a booking of a large room for prayer. Such bookings must be requested through the normal room booking procedure.

d. PGR Study Space only: Due to the limited availability of PGR study space, it is not possible to guarantee study spaces for specific gender groups.

4. **RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE**
   a. ACADEMIC CALENDAR
      i. Those who set the University calendar and timetable seek to support the spirit of diversity and inclusiveness which underpins this Policy. However, they are constrained by a range of complex practical factors in teaching and learning delivery which means that it will not always be possible to adjust the timescales of learning activities for religious observance.
      ii. Staff with responsibility for decision-making around timetabling and scheduling should have awareness of the most common challenges around timetabling and faith (with reference to a faith events calendar on the UoE website and consultation with relevant staff and students).
      iii. Academic staff should facilitate open conversation with students who are affected by the timetabling of teaching and learning events during any religious observance period. This will enable the creation of an empathetic support structure for those who may face difficulties due to scheduling conflicts.
   b. TEACHING, RESEARCH AND OTHER LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES
      iv. Teaching, PGR training/events and other learning opportunities may be scheduled on days of religious observance. The University timetable has been designed to ensure that teaching, research and learning requirements are delivered efficiently and effectively within the available time and space. For these reasons, the timetable may not always be able to accommodate all religious observance requirements on campus, although the University will strive to do so wherever possible.
      v. Departments should inform students by the start of each term of their programme if there are any specific learning/assessment attendance requirements which take place outside of normal core weekday hours of 8:30 am to 6:30 pm (as described in the Policy on Timetabling Teaching Activities), such as over weekends.
      vi. The University understands that there may be certain occasions when a student may be absent due to religious observance. If religious observance means that a student will miss a lecture or other scheduled learning or research event, they must notify their module leader(s) or supervisor(s) in advance. In addition, students must report their absence via the My Exeter absence reporting tool or as directed by their Faculty (or delegated School). PGR students should refer to The PGR Student Absence Policy and record their absence in the Trent PGR Absence Record. The request will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by relevant teams, to determine if the absence is likely to be recorded as authorised.
      vii. If feasible, it is important for staff to show flexibility and understanding towards students who may require some leeway, such as arriving late or departing early due to religious obligations. It may be helpful to explore the use of technologies to minimise the impact of absences for students who are unable to attend the full class due to religious or other reasons.

viii. Religious requirements may be observed as well as praying at certain times of the day. Obligations to pray should be fulfilled either before or after scheduled academic or research activity wherever possible. **Where this is not reasonably possible, the University recognises the right of students to excuse themselves for a short time to fulfil religious obligations.**

ix. If a student needs time to pray, they should speak to the lecturer/supervisor beforehand and arrange to leave to pray during **the break** if possible. The University will consider reasonable requests for the use of space to pray in academic buildings on an ad-hoc basis so that the student maximises their learning opportunities.

x. Students should discuss any issues around religious observance and its impact on placements and field trips with their lecturer/module leader/supervisor as it may be possible to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate these.

xi. Content from the missed learning and/or research opportunities resulting from participation in prayer and other religious obligations must be addressed by the student. Academic staff should be supportive of this by ensuring that any learning resources normally distributed in the class are available to students. It may be helpful to explore the use of technologies to minimise the impact of absences for students who are unable to attend the full class due to religious or other reasons.

c. IN-PERSON AND ONLINE TIMELINE/SPECIFIC ASSESSMENTS SCHEDULED OUTSIDE THE FORMAL EXAMINATION PERIOD

xii. Many courses and modules include in-person summative and formative assessments which are undertaken outside the formal examination period, including in-class tests, lab tests, presentations, practicals, vivas, performances etc.

xiii. Where it is not possible for an assessment to be held other than on a religious observance date, and/or a student is unable to attend University because of religious observance, the student should submit a Mitigation Application form in accordance with the requirements of the university`s mitigation policy and regulations. If the Multifaith Chaplaincy can confirm the date of religious observance, the student will be offered a deferral to the next available opportunity.

xiv. For PGR students arranging upgrade or final viva examinations, every effort will be made to schedule the examination outside of religious observance dates. Students should discuss such dates with their supervisor for upgrade viva dates or notify the PGR Administration team via the thesis submission form for the final viva examination. See section 4. e below for further details regarding PGR examinations.

xv. Students on the Degree Apprenticeship (DA) Programmes should consider the days for any religious observances for the End Point Assessment (EPA) before they make any bookings.

d. COURSEWORK SUBMISSION DEADLINES

xvi.   Deadlines for submitting any coursework assessment will not normally be extended to allow for religious observance, and students must schedule their work accordingly. However, if students wish, they could use the evidence-free extension as per the given instructions (https://www.exeter.ac.uk/students/infopoints/yourinfopointservices/mitigation/)

e. PGR UPGRADE SUBMISSION DEADLINES
xvii.   Deadlines for submitting a PGR Upgrade portfolio will not normally be extended to allow for religious observance, and students must schedule their work accordingly. However, if students wish, they could request a deferral for a maximum of 2 weeks if their religious observance requirements impact their submission. Should students need longer, they are encouraged to consider an interruption to study instead, (see Periods of registration and changes to registration status for Postgraduate Research students).

f. EXAMINATIONS
xviii.   For Taught Students:
1. The University will make every effort, in its timetabling of exams, to avoid holding exams on religious days or festivals which occur during exam periods for those students whose commitment to the observance of their faith would otherwise cause them to miss the exam. Any affected students must fill in the Examinations and Religious Observance Form by the dates given on the links below which cover both Exeter and Cornwall campuses:

https://www.exeter.ac.uk/students/administration/examsandassessment/ugpgt/religiousobservance/

2. The University understands that there may be occasions when a student may be unable to attend an examination due to religious observance. If religious observance means that a student will miss a formal scheduled examination, and the student requested an adjustment to the timetable by the given deadlines and the University was unable to adjust for this, the student should submit a Mitigation Application form in accordance with the requirements of the university`s mitigation policy and regulations. If the Multifaith Chaplaincy can confirm the date of religious observance, the student will be offered a deferral to the next available opportunity.

3. The University's policy is that it will consider applications for amendments to the taught examination timetable with regard to religious observance that usually occurs over a restricted period, such as Eid ul Fitr, Shavuot, Vaisakhi and Shivaratri. It is not able to consider applications where religious observance extends over a significant period (e.g., Ramadan, lent, Chinese New Year etc.), or where the normal expectation is that daily activities (including examinations) will continue as usual. It is also unable to consider

applications for amendments to the examination timetable in relation to students making religious visits.

xix.   For PGR students

1. For upgrades: Students with religious requirements or observance should inform the PGR Support team of any religious days or festivals that they observe which may fall within the upgrade period (usually within 1 month from the date of submitting the upgrade portfolio). The Upgrade Panel and students should make every effort to avoid scheduling the date for the upgrade viva examination on religious days or festivals which the student observes.

2. For *viva voce/*final examinations: Students with religious requirements or observance should inform the PGR Administration team of any religious days or festivals that they observe which may fall within the examination period (usually 3 months from the date of thesis submission). This information should be included in the PGR Submission form, available in the PGR Handbook. The Board of Examiners and students should make every effort to avoid scheduling the date for the *viva voce* examination on religious days or festivals which the student observes.

3. The University is not able to consider applications for amendments to the examination timetable or the scheduling of PGR examinations where religious observance extends over a significant period (e.g., Ramadan, lent, Chinese New year etc.), or where the normal expectation is that daily activities (including examinations) will continue as usual. It is also unable to consider applications for amendments to the examination timetable or scheduling of PGR examinations in relation to students making holy visits.

xx.   For all students

1. Every effort will be made to accommodate students' religious requirements, but the University reserves the right to hold examinations on any day and time during these periods if alternatives cannot be found.

2. The University understands that the certain religious requirements such as praying may be observed at certain times of the day. During the formal examination period, where possible, students need to make arrangements to pray at lunchtime, and then to fulfil their afternoon prayer obligations after the end of an afternoon examination. Where possible, the University will ensure that prayer rooms are easily accessible and in close proximity to the examination room.

3. As part of the University`s quality assurances processes, there are circumstances in which we need to identify students undertaking any academic work including when they are undertaking examinations and other assessments. If the clothes worn by any

candidate for an assessment or formal examination make the identification of that person difficult, this will be handled sensitively and compassionately. However, they should bring with them to the examination room some form of identification with a signature and replicate that signature in the presence of the invigilator on request. Otherwise, they will be required to reveal their features to an invigilator of the same gender in private, sufficiently to allow their identity to be checked. If this affects students completing online examinations, students should discuss the matter with their academic/personal tutor (taught students) or pastoral tutor (PGR students).

5. BREACHES OF THE POLICY

    a. Any students who feel they have been treated in ways that breach this policy should first discuss it with their academic/personal tutor (taught students) or pastoral tutor (research students) with a view to finding an informal way to resolution. They can seek advice from the Department Academic Lead for Student Support (Racial Equality and Inclusion) in this process (https://www.exeter.ac.uk/students/alss/). If this is unsuccessful, individuals can access the procedure appropriate to their situation, as detailed on the Exeter Speaks Out webpages. The formal process can be found here. https://www.exeter.ac.uk/about/speakout/report/formalreport/

It is important to note that any behaviour that intimidates, is hostile, degrading or humiliating towards a member of staff or fellow student based on their belief or belief practice, or assumptions about the same, constitutes harassment and will be cause for disciplinary action.