

UNIVERSITY OF KENT

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY: GUIDELINES ON CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

1. PURPOSE

These guidelines give practical advice and consideration to issues which may affect staff and students relating to their individual and communal religious and cultural needs. As such they follow from and strengthen the Equality and Diversity Policy of the University of Kent and its Race Equality Policy.

They seek to present a coherent approach rather than definitive statements which cover every possible situation.

The guidelines are written following the principles Employment (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 (which also covers education) and the Human Rights Act 1998, Article 9 (freedom of thought, conscience and religion).

2. AIMS

The Aims of the Equality and Diversity Policy include the statements that:

- The University of Kent is committed to the creation and support of a balanced, inclusive and diverse community which is open and accessible to all students, staff and members of the public
- The University aims to become an inclusive community where individuals are integrated within the Institution, where the diversity of individuals is recognised and there is flexibility to support their differing aspirations and goals.

These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Equality and Diversity Policy, and Race Equality Policy (www.kent.ac.uk/hr-equalityanddiversity/equality-and-diversity/index.htm) and the Dignity at Work and Study Policy (www.kent.ac.uk/hr-equalityanddiversity/dignity-at-work-and-study/index.html)

3. DEFINITIONS

- 3.1 In accordance with the Employment (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, the University adopts this definition of religion:

‘Any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief. This does not include any philosophical belief or political belief unless that belief is similar to a religious belief’.

- 3.2 For the purposes of these Regulations, a person ‘A’ discriminates against another ‘B’ if

- a) on grounds of religion or belief, A treats B less favourably than s/he treats or would treat other persons; or
- b) A applies to B a provision, criterion or practice which s/he applies or would apply equally to persons not of the same religion or belief as B, but
 - 1. which puts or would put persons of the same religion or belief as B at a particular disadvantage when compared with other persons,
 - 2. which puts B at that disadvantage and
 - 3. which A cannot show to be proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

3.3 Harassment Religious harassment includes engaging in unwanted conduct with the purpose and effect of violating another's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. This is contrary to our Personal Harassment Policy.

3.4 Academic Freedom Nothing within these Guidelines should be read as preventing proper and informed academic discussions within the context of learning and teaching.

4. DRESS CODE

4.1 The wearing of religious and cultural dress (for example clerical collars, hijab-headscarves, kippah-skullcaps and turbans) is welcomed by the University and must not be discouraged or disparaged. There may be exceptions where the health, safety and welfare of the wearer are compromised for example by the wearing of such dress and/or where this is likely to put others at risk. In such situations, a risk assessment should be undertaken and the employee/student and Line Manager/Tutor or other responsible member of staff should aim to reach a satisfactory compromise. If this is not possible, the Health and Safety Director should be asked to advise both parties.

4.2 All members of the University should avoid wearing T-shirts or other dress displaying material, in any language, which may be considered offensive and likely to breach national law, for example racist slogans. Breach of this will be considered a breach of the Equality and Diversity Policy. The University will take appropriate disciplinary action if this comes to light.

5. ACCOMMODATION AND CATERING

5.1 The University recognises the problems that maybe experienced by a small minority of students, with particular accommodation and catering needs relating to religious observation. The University is seeking to

increase provision of self-catering facilities on-campus and the leasing of houses off-campus. All new entrants to the University may be considered for on-campus accommodation, but the University does not have a policy which allocates accommodation to any student for religious reasons.

- 5.2. Students who have strict dietary needs related their religion can use the kitchen facilities available within colleges or other self-catering accommodation if they are in University accommodation. All students are asked to be tolerant of each other's needs when sharing kitchen facilities. Depending on the degree of observance, some students will not wish to cook at the same time as other people who do not share their dietary rules, and sensible time-tabling of use should be agreed. The University also offers a range of menus designed to suit students with disparate dietary requirement.
- 5.3. Kosher (Jewish) and Halal (Muslim) Food is available from the campus shop. There are always vegetarian options available at all catering outlets.
- 5.4. The University provides a range of social and recreational areas open to all staff and students. Many students choose to spend time socialising in the bars run by either the SU or the University.

The University, appreciating that the use of alcohol is prohibited in certain religions, is working to increase the number of social areas which are alcohol free. Current outlets include: Venue, Balcony Bar (day time), Keynes Food to Go Café, Sports Hall Colours Café, Staff Common Rooms.

6. CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

- 6.1 The requirement and need to pray in a particular form is a matter of personal choice based on the nature and depth of personal belief. Practising staff and students should discuss with their line manager or tutor if they have any special prayer requirements.

Line managers and tutors are responsible for ensuring that if other staff or students are affected by an individual's prayer needs, a reasonable degree of respect and understanding exists among them.

The University currently strives to offer flexible working patterns to all staff within operational need, and line managers and tutors should exercise flexibility in allowing staff or students to comply with their prayer needs including occasional attendance for specific obligations. The individuals should be aware that they will be required to make up any time lost.

Shifts and Rotas should be capable of flexibility to allow staff time for key worship dates.

Staff needing guidance on particular requests should consult the Equality Co-ordinator, HR or the Chaplaincy for advice.

6.2. HR will be flexible in the arrangement of selection interviews if candidates are not able to attend on pre-arranged dates due to religious observance.

6.3. Provision of Prayer Space: The University has the following accommodation available:

Muslim Prayer Room: Rutherford College Seminar Room 18
Eliot College non-denominational Chapel.

6.4. Individuals will not be required to work for specified periods of time such as mid-day on Friday, Saturday or Sundays where it conflicts with their religious beliefs.

7. APPROVED ABSENCE FOR CULTURAL/RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS

7.1 **Staff** sympathetic consideration will be expected from line managers to requests for leave from employees specifically wishing to participate in cultural/religious festivals, providing this need is brought to the attention of the line manager at the earliest possible moment, i.e. at the commencement of the leave year, or on joining the employment of the University. Line managers should use the current University annual leave system or their discretion for time off in lieu, and in exceptional circumstances, unpaid leave, to facilitate these requests. In cases of dispute, Line Managers and staff should refer to Equality Co-ordinator or HR for advice.

7.2. Students When devising assessment and examination timetables, arranging open days etc, staff should take into account the impact of significant cultural/religious events.

Students wishing to participate in cultural/religious festivals should give advance notice to the appropriate member of staff for permission to be absent. However, it remains the student's responsibility to make good any missed learning opportunities.

Students should inform their tutor and the examination office as early as possible of any holy days which might cause conflict and will fall within the examination period.

8. RESPONSIBILITIES

All staff and students must treat others with respect, and are expected to refrain from any discriminatory harassing behaviour which relates to current or historical conflict between people of different religious groups.

Any attempt to coerce/enforce others to comply with a particular religious viewpoint, for example through hate publicity, offensive remarks and/or misuse of the University's services or facilities, or actions that may bring the University into disrepute, may result in disciplinary action.

Any abuse of this policy may result in disciplinary action.

- 8.1 The University** welcomes the availability of information about different religious traditions, and the groups representing them in University life. The University, through the Staff Development Unit, will provide Cultural Diversity Training for staff.
- 8.2 Kent Students' Union**, through the many Societies it supports, seeks to expand understanding between diverse religions and cultures. The annual One World Week in Lent Term is the focus for such activities.
- 8.3 Managers** are responsible for consulting with HR to ensure the fair and consistent implementation of these Guidelines.
- 8.4 All Staff and Students** Individuals are responsible for making alternative arrangements for work and study missed as a result of absences for cultural/religious observance. Staff are responsible for attending appropriate training and awareness sessions as provided by the University.

9. THE MULTI FAITH CHAPLAINCY

This provides opportunities for worship, discussion and social meetings and personal support. The list of individual faith chaplains is available in the University Telephone Directory. These chaplains are available to give further advice to any staff or students who have particular concerns arising from these guidelines.

10. COMPLAINTS

If, after attempts to reach agreement, you have a complaint against the unfair operation of this policy, or of discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, this should be made in accordance with the complaints procedure in the Equality and Diversity Policy.

The University Harassment Policy covers any complaints of religious harassment.

11. SOURCES OF FURTHER HELP

Please contact the Equality & Diversity Manager in the first instance for clarification of any issue within these Guidelines. Irfaan Arif, i.arif@kent.ac.uk extension 4781

Safety Health and Environment Unit Telephone 823980

www.kent.ac.uk/safety

The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy: Telephone 824000 www.kent.ac.uk/chaplaincy

Resource books available through Equality Co-ordinator: Religions in the UK, Directory, published by the Multi-Faith Centre at the University of Derby and the Interfaith Network for the United Kingdom.

CANDIFA (Canterbury & District Inter- Faith Association) email

walling@fish.co.uk

SHAP Calendar of Religious Festivals, (available from Departmental Administrators).

Cultural Diversity Guide, Granada, 2003.

The Equality Promotion Group will review these Guidelines every two years, in consultation with appropriate services.