

UNIVERSITY OF KENT EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY GUIDELINES: 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 the University of Kent's commitment to Equality, Diversity Inclusivity. 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 Dignity at Study Policy include the statement that: "The University of Kent is committed to a working and learning culture that encompasses dignity, courtesy, respect and consideration for all. All staff and students have a responsibility to create an environment that is free from harassment, bullying, unlawful discrimination and victimisation" These guidelines should be read in conjunction with the Dignity at Study Policy www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/general.html and the General Regulations for Students www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/Regulations%20Booklet/generalregs.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
 - I. which puts or would put persons of the same religion or belief as B at a particular disadvantage when compared with other persons,
 - II. which puts B at that disadvantage and 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 Dignity at Study 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 may be experienced by a small minority of students with particular accommodation and catering needs relating to religious observance. The University is seeking to increase provision of on-campus self-catering facilities. 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 timetabling of use should be agreed. The University also offers a range of menus designed to suit students with disparate dietary requirements (see below).

5.3. Vegetarian options are available at all catering outlets and efforts may be made to ensure the provision of labelled Halal (Muslim) and Kosher (Jewish) products and options where there is demand. Students and staff are encouraged to check with the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Officer at Student Services for details of current provision. Contact details are available on the Student Services webpages www.kent.ac.uk/student-services/staff/index.html

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 Kent Union 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.

6. CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

6.1 The requirement and need to pray in a particular form is a matter of personal choice related to 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 try to 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.

6.2. HR may 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. Prayer Space: The University has the following accommodation available, which is accessible to all staff and students, though at times usage may be governed by group and event booking arrangements: Canterbury Campus: The Prayer Room at Rutherford College Seminar Room 18 (provision for Muslim staff and students); The Chapel at Eliot College (non-denominational - provision for Christian staff and students). Medway Campus: Multifaith Prayer Space (Pilkington 036-039).

6.4. 6.1, above, implies that individuals may not be required to work for specified periods of time such as midday on Friday, Saturday or Sundays where it conflicts with the demands of their religious beliefs and customs and those needing guidance on particular requests should consult the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) Officer at Student Services, HR or the Chaplaincy for advice.

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 the Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Manager within HR for advice.

7.2. Students When devising assessment and examination timetables, arranging open days etc. staff may 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, and take relevant University regulations into consideration.

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.

8.2 Kent Union, through the many Societies it supports, seeks to expand understanding between diverse religions and cultures.

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 MULTIFAITH CHAPLAINCY

This provides opportunities for worship, discussion and social meetings and personal support. The list of individual faith chaplains is widely available www.kent.ac.uk/chaplaincy 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 for Students www.kent.ac.uk/regulations/general.html or the Grievance Resolution Procedure for Staff (Ordinance 42) www.kent.ac.uk/hr_staffinformation/statute/index.html?tab=ordinance-42-grievance

11. SOURCES OF FURTHER HELP

Please contact the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Officer in Student Services in the first instance for clarification of any issue within these Guidelines. Contact details are available at www.kent.ac.uk/student-services/staff/index.html The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy: Telephone 827491 www.kent.ac.uk/chaplaincy Calendar of Religious Festivals - follow the link on the University Events Calendar <https://www.kent.ac.uk/calendar> The Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Officer will ensure that these Guidelines are regularly reviewed, in consultation with appropriate services.

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