

Religion and Belief Guidance relating to Education and Student Experience at UCL

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Introduction

UCL values the diversity of our staff and student body. UCL will not tolerate discrimination, victimisation or harassment based on a person's religion or belief (or lack of belief) and aims to provide an environment based on understanding and respect - an environment inclusive to all.

This guidance document provides information on how your needs with respect to religion and belief are to be met by UCL and the students that study alongside you.

The guidance does not intend to be comprehensive; rather it addresses some important issues that may arise in this context: this is therefore a guiding framework and a living document.

UCL recognises:

- the importance of spiritual and religious belief in people.
- that spiritual and moral systems that religions and beliefs offer can be of fundamental importance to the wellbeing of students.
- those religious practices and rituals, such as dress, diet, and prayer, can be an integral and in some cases a non-optional, part of religious life.
- that wherever it can, the needs of all students are met, students from all religious backgrounds, and students with no religious affiliation.
- that the freedom and ability to practice deeply held faith as a member of the UCL community can be fundamental to experiencing a sense of belonging to the UCL community.
- religion and belief or a lack thereof, is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 and UCL will not tolerate any form discrimination or harassment associated with religious identity or practice (or lack of religious affiliation). This explicitly includes but is not restricted to antisemitism and Islamophobia.

Scope of the guidance

This guidance document does not give an exhaustive list of religion and belief equality issues. If further guidance is needed, please email equalities@ucl.ac.uk

UCL history and ethos

UCL is a diverse university, which strives towards inclusivity. Our commitment to religious equality is integral to our identity and heritage.

Before UCL's inception in 1826, the benefits of a university education in England were restricted to men who were members of the Church of England (Anglican). UCL was founded

on the principle that it was open to students of any faith, and none. This was an alternative to the social exclusivity and religious restrictions of its predecessors, Oxford, and Cambridge.

UCL does not have any religious affiliation or endorse any faith. The secular values that UCL upholds are as relevant today as they were at its inception. UCL is committed to providing an inclusive learning and working environment where students and staff of all religions, or none, can thrive.

UCL is a global University. It has a rich mix of students from a wide variety of cultural and religious backgrounds. UCL acknowledges this diversity and complexity greatly contributes to it being a world-class institution.

Guidance framework

This guidance covers any religion, religious belief, similar philosophical belief, or lack of belief but does not ordinarily cover political belief.

Regardless of UCL's standing as a secular institution, the provisions of the Equality Act in relation to Religion or Belief apply to the student experience.

There is no exhaustive definition of these beliefs, but in case law it has been determined that to be protected by law, a belief must be "cogent, serious and worthy of respect in a democratic society".

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

- [Equality Act \(2010\)](#)
Equality Act Explanatory Notes, Section 10 – article 51, explains that: "The protected characteristic of religion or religious or philosophical belief, which is stated to include for this purpose a lack of religion or belief. It is a broad definition in line with the freedom of thought, conscience and religion guaranteed by Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The main limitation for the purposes of Article 9 is that the religion must have a clear structure and belief system. Denominations or sects within a religion can be considered to be a religion or belief, such as Protestants and Catholics within Christianity".
- [Equality Act \(2010\) – Technical Guidance on Further and Higher Education](#) (pdf)
- [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) (2011)
The Equality Act includes a public sector Equality Duty (also known as the General Duty), which requires public bodies, when exercising their functions, to have due regard to the need to eliminate religion or belief discrimination, harassment, victimisation; advance equality of opportunity for people of different religion or belief groups and foster good relations between people who share the protected religion or belief characteristic and those who do not. Accordingly, there is a need to be proactive in tackling religion or belief discrimination, inequalities, in identifying

and responding to the needs of people who share the protected characteristic of religion/belief when designing and delivering services.

- [\(Equality & Human Rights Commission\) Religion or Belief Guide to the Law](#) (2016) (pdf)
- [Racial and Religious Hatred Act](#) (2006)
- [Human Rights Act](#) (1998)

This guidance follows and reinforces the religious equality provisions within:

- [UCL's Equal Opportunities Policy](#) (2017) (pdf)
- [Religion & Belief: Guidance for UCL Managers](#) (pdf)
- [Student Harassment and Bullying Policy](#)
- [Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy](#) (2020)
- [Section 1: Code of Conduct for Students](#) (2021-2022)
- UCL Student Support Framework - Draft 4.0 (2022-23)

[Academic freedom and freedom of thought, conscience, and religion](#)

UCL is an academic institution that places high value on open and reasoned debate. We recognise the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. These rights are absolute, but manifestations of these beliefs are not.

This guidance does not contravene the right of an individual to hold their own views, but beliefs must be expressed in ways that are not intimidating, hostile, or degrading to others or in a form that constitutes harassment by having this effect on others.

Therefore, the right to manifest a belief may be qualified by the need to show respect for the differing worldviews, lifestyles, and identities of others.

UCL has an over-arching responsibility to promote pluralism, tolerance and foster good relations and will seek to intervene in instances where manifestations of a belief constitute harassment or create conflict that goes beyond open and reasoned debate.

Religious belief will not be used to justify discriminatory behaviour. Instances of this nature may be dealt with under the [Disciplinary Code and Procedure in Respect of Students](#).

Guest speakers can be invited to speak on campus within the framework set out in the [University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech](#) and where relevant should be made aware of the provisions of this guidance document. Quick access to relevant information can be found on this UCL webpage: [external speakers](#).

[Religious dress](#)

UCL welcomes the diversity of different attire worn by its students.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/policies/equality/religion>

The wearing of religious and cultural dress, including clerical collars, headscarves, turbans, and yarmulkes is allowed and must not be discouraged.

However, there are situations where some students may not be able to wear certain religious dress due to health and safety considerations and/or the need for communication between individuals.

This may apply, for example, in medical and laboratory-based disciplines. To comply with health and safety regulations, specific items of clothing such as overalls, protective clothing etc., may also need to be worn.

The need to comply with health and safety must be given priority over the need for religious expression. Every effort will be made to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

Individual cases can be referred to the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion team for guidance, please email equalities@ucl.ac.uk.

Student ID cards must have photographs which are compliant with UK passport standards.

Security and examination requirements mean that students may have to be authenticated against their ID cards. If headwear obstructs the face, the temporary removal of such items may be necessary. This will be done in an appropriate location by a staff member of the same sex.

Recruitment and selection

UCL collects data on students' religion or belief in line with the [requirements of the Higher Education Statistics Agency \(HESA\)](#). The data is held in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) policies on protected personal characteristics.

Religious discrimination in the recruitment and selection of students will not be tolerated and any allegations of this nature will be fully investigated.

Teaching, learning and assessment

Enrolment

UCL will endeavour to organise enrolment days and times that do not clash with major religious festivals. Where a clash is unavoidable, alternative days for enrolment will be provided, if possible.

Timetabling

The UCL timetable is designed to ensure that teaching and learning requirements are delivered efficiently and effectively within the available time and space.

It may be the case at a local level, especially if departments are aware of previous incidents or calls from students, that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is necessary to determine any disproportionate impact to a particular group, for example to Jewish and Muslim students, with the timetabling of mandatory teaching sessions on Fridays.

However, there may be logistical reasons why a timetable may not be able to accommodate all forms of religious observance requirement on campus. The normal teaching day runs from 9 am to 6 pm from Monday to Friday.

UCL understands that there may be certain occasions when a student may be absent due to religious observance. Staff are expected to seek to accommodate these observances, as much as is practicable and reasonable, within the scope of the current Student Attendance Policy.

Field classes

Certain programmes may schedule field classes on weekends, during vacation periods and public holidays. Students requiring academic adjustments from these activities on religious grounds should discuss this and request permission from their department, within the scope of the current UCL Student Support Framework (2022-23).

Deadlines

Deans, Heads of Department, Faculty and Admissions Tutors, Directors of Services, Registry and Examination Officers, and all responsible officers should consider the main religious festivals and needs relating to Friday prayers (for Muslims) and Sabbath (Friday afternoons and Saturdays) (for Jews) when drawing up assessment, examination, or interview dates for student admissions. UCL provides guidance on the occurrence of [major religious and cultural festivals](#).

Assessment deadlines

Programme directors are encouraged to consult the [UCL diversity calendar](#) in advance of setting assessment deadlines.

Assessment deadlines are given in advance to students. Students who are observing religious festivals around the time of the deadline will need to plan their work, so that it is completed in good time.

Examination schedules

UCL refers to the UCL diversity calendar in advance of scheduling the centrally managed assessment timetables and will note religious observances where work is prohibited, and where there is a clash of dates. As far as is practicable, examinations will be scheduled to avoid religious festivals and Sabbath, where work is prohibited. This consideration also falls to academic departments when scheduling departmentally managed exams.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/policies/equality/religion>

Extenuating circumstances

[UCL Extenuating Circumstances Procedure](#)

If you observe religious beliefs or cultural customs, for example fasting, you must discuss any concerns under academic adjustments (UCL Student Support Framework (2022-23)).

[Extended leave for religious festivals](#)

UCL will not allow students to take extended leave for religious events. However, students might make a formal request to interrupt their studies.

[Work placements](#)

When students are on work placement, they are expected to adhere to the policies and practices of their host organisation. The onus is on the student to research these practices and facilities in advance before agreeing to a work placement programme.

Facilities and services

[Contemplation facilities](#)

The Prayer Room and Meditation Room are spaces on UCL's main campus where students can pray or engage in quiet reflection or meditation.

UCL acknowledges that currently prayer space on campus is not adequate to meet demand.

Booking regular spaces on campus will be supported as a temporary solution; in the longer term, Estates, Campus Experience, and Infrastructure will coordinate with the Islamic Society and other faith communities, advised by the EDI team, to fully understand the pattern of requirements through the year, and work with the Quiet Contemplation Room Steering Group to develop a long-term sustainable solution.

[Food and drink](#)

UCL and Students' Union UCL have outlets which sell a variety of food options based upon the [Healthy and Sustainable Food Policy \(2021\)](#) and accordingly these outlets will have vegetarian and vegan options, with some stocking kosher and halal foods. Events organised by UCL will have vegetarian options when food is provided. Some UCL events serve alcohol but there will always be non-alcoholic and beverages without stimulants, and bottled water will always be provided.

Harassment

Harassment and discrimination of students on the grounds of religion, belief or non-belief will not be tolerated and will be dealt with under UCL's [Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy](#), as a disciplinary matter.

Harassment is defined in law as “unwanted conduct ...which has the purpose or effect of either violating the claimant's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them”.

Harassment on the grounds of religion or belief may occur for a variety of reasons, for example:

- Due to a person's belief, or non-belief
- on the grounds of the belief, or non-belief of someone with whom they associate
- in joining or leaving, a particular faith
- with expressing or not expressing, their faith
- because they have changed, or renounced their religious / belief allegiance

Complaints

Academic Board's [Working Group on Racism and Prejudice](#) highlighted concerns that UCL's complaints procedures are not clear to students and need to be made more accessible.

Any complaints of discrimination, based on the provisions outlined in this document, should be made in the first instance to the Director of Equality, Diversity & Inclusion by emailing equalities@ucl.ac.uk

If you wish to report bullying or harassment related to religion or belief, please do so via the [Report + Support](#) online tool. This can be done anonymously, if preferred, but is also a route to making a formal complaint.

Lastly, if you wish to raise a formal complaint, you may do so by emailing the Student Casework Team via casework@ucl.ac.uk.

Implementation

This guidance applies to all UCL students and responsibility for it is held with staff, contractors, security staff, service providers and any other individual associated with the functions of the University.

Deans, Vice-Deans (EDI), Heads of Departments and Heads of Service have a responsibility to raise the profile of this guidance document and to ensure that all their staff or students are aware of its contents and requirements.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/policies/equality/religion>

Guidance is also available from UCL UMC Religion and Belief Equality Champion who takes responsibility for ensuring that issues relating to equality, broadly construed, are appropriately represented in UCL's decision making processes.

The awareness and understanding of religious requirements and context are fundamental to achieving an inclusive response to the needs of students of faith.

A greater understanding of, for example, Judaism and Islam (including what constitutes antisemitism and Islamophobia) aids understanding and response to student issues and/or requests to meet religious observances.

Religion and belief guidance relating to staff can be found in the [Religion and Belief: Guidance for UCL Managers](#)

Communication

The guidance will be notified and made accessible to all students and staff, through multiple routes: Students' Union UCL, student faith societies, staff newsletters, EDI newsletter, staff equality groups, via Vice Deans (EDI) to Faculties, to name a few.

Monitoring, evaluation, and review

The guidance will be reviewed at least every three years by the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Committee, in conjunction with the Education Committee.

They will also take responsibility for monitoring this guidance.

Transparency on the use of "Prevent"

Section 26 of the Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015, requires UCL, in the exercise of its functions, to have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". This duty is known as the "Prevent" duty.

UCL reports annually on "Prevent" to Academic Committee and this can be made available to Students' Union UCL, SU Sabbatical Officers and the Islamic Society.

Currently, Sabbatical Officers leave Academic Committee when this report is presented, as part of a no-cooperation with the "Prevent" policy.

It should be noted that UCL takes a safeguarding stance with regards to students and staff in the use of Prevent.

<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/policies/equality/religion>

Useful contacts

[Student Support & Wellbeing](#)

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion team: equalities@ucl.ac.uk

[Interim Chaplain and Interfaith Advisor to UCL](#)

Students' Union Sabbatical Officer: tbc

UCL UMC Religion and Belief Champion: tbc

Faith at UCL

All major faiths are represented by a student union society at UCL. Some of their pages on the Students' Union UCL website are listed below; many of them may also be found on Facebook and Twitter.

- [Ahlul-Bayt Society](#)
- [Buddhist Society](#)
- [Catholic Society](#)
- [Christian Union](#)
- [Hindu Society](#)
- [Islamic Society](#)
- [Islamic Society \(RUMS\)](#)
- [Jewish Society](#)
- [Sikh Society](#)
- [UCL Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society](#)

Appendix: Document Details

Title	Religion and Belief Guidance relating to Education and Student Experience at UCL
Author	Ash Talwar Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Manager Office of the President and Provost
Owner	Equality, Diversity & Inclusion team
Date Published / approved	Approved initially in 2014 Revised 2016 Contact details amended 2018 Revised and updated February 2022 Revised for Academic Manual and sent to Education Committee July 2022
Version	4
Next Review	July 2025
Audience	Students and Staff
Related	UCL's Equal Opportunities Policy (2017) (pdf) Religion & Belief: Guidance for UCL Managers (pdf) Student Harassment and Bullying Policy Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Sexual Misconduct Policy (2020) Section 1: Code of Conduct for Students (2021-2022) UCL Student Support Framework (2022-23)
Subject / Description	Provides a statement from University College London regarding guidance to staff on how to support students in relation to religion and belief issues and a statement to students upon what they can reasonably expect in terms of recognition and support from the Institution.
Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)	Not conducted