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Institute of Education
University of London

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Religion and Belief Policy

The Institute of Education is a secular institution with a core commitment to ensuring equality and promoting diversity.

For the purposes of this policy, the phrase 'religion and belief' includes religion or belief and similar philosophical belief (including atheism and agnosticism)¹. This policy covers individual thought and also any collective manifestation of that opinion or belief.

We believe that the rights to freedom of thought in matters of religion and belief are absolute. Further, we expect the rights of individuals and groups to express their own convictions to be respected, as long as this expression does not impinge on the rights and freedoms of others to work and study without fear, hostility, or alienation.

In applying this policy, we aim to create a positive environment where each individual, regardless of their religion or belief, is valued and respected and we are committed to preventing discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief. We demonstrate this commitment by ensuring that:

- Individuals and groups are treated with dignity and fairness whatever their religion or belief.
- Institute policies, practices and provisions will, as far as possible, apply equally to persons of all religions and beliefs, and will not put people of one religion or belief at a disadvantage when compared to others.
- Where policies, practices, and provisions are likely to have a different impact on individuals of a particular religion or belief, alternative formulations will be explored, and where the differential impact cannot be eradicated, it will, as far as is reasonably practicable, be minimised.

¹ The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 (EE(RB)R) provides protection for *all religions and beliefs with a clear structure and belief system* and those who do not believe in, or who question, the existence of a higher being. Under the EE(RB)R the term for such beliefs is 'similar philosophical belief', which gives people with atheist or agnostic beliefs the same level of protection.

Implementation and Responsibilities

The Director has ultimate executive responsibility for the effective development and implementation of this policy.

Deans of Faculties and Heads of Support Departments are responsible for the implementation of the policy within their Faculties and Departments.

All line managers are responsible for familiarising themselves with this policy, and for following it in matters such as requests for leave.

All individual students and members of staff are responsible for familiarising themselves with this policy, and for informing appropriate colleagues of their particular requirements.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

The Institute's Equality and Diversity Committee will monitor and evaluate the implementation of this policy.

The Institute's Policy on Religion and Belief will be reviewed not less than every three years.

Guidance on the implementation of the Policy on Religion and Belief

1. Religious Observance

1.1 The Institute will consult with staff and students so that religious observance can be accommodated into the institutional timetable as far as is practicable.

1.2 All staff and students regardless of religion or belief and similar philosophical belief are required to work or study in accordance with the requirements of their contract or programme of study. Requests for adjustments to work or study arrangements will be facilitated as far as is practicable provided sufficient notice is given.

1.3 Changes to working hours necessitated by religious observance should be accommodated through the Institute's Flexible Leave Policy or arrangements made locally for temporary adjustments (e.g., the early departure for Jewish staff on Fridays during the Winter months).

1.4 The Institute has a multifaith prayer room that is open to all staff, students and visitors. The room is located on level 2 in The Student's Union. Further information can be found in the Multifaith Prayer Room Guidelines.

1.5 Information on alternative local places of worship can also be provided.

1.6 The University of London Chaplaincy offers pastoral counselling and support and guidance in matters of faith and spiritual development for all students and staff of the Christian and Jewish traditions, and also those with no religious background. Further information is available at: <http://www.lon.ac.uk/chaplaincy.html>.

2. Religious Leave

2.1 Holiday arrangements include time off at Christmas and Good Friday, both of which are Christian religious festivals, together with Easter Monday. In the interests of equality, those practising other religions or beliefs are able to book three days of religious leave (pro rata for part-time staff) on the dates of most significance to them. Further information on this can be found in the Religious Leave Policy.

3. Learning and Teaching

3.1 The Institute will assess the calendar regarding teaching and assessment in relation to religious observance of diverse faiths and will reasonably accommodate specific requests as and when necessary.

3.2 So far as is practicable, due consideration will be paid to major religious celebrations, festivals and ceremonies. Students and staff should inform the Institute of approximate date(s) of the festival as soon as they are known, so that appropriate arrangements can be made.

4. Dress Code

4.1 The Institute imposes no overall dress code on its employees, students and visitors (except where a job requires a uniform or protective clothing to be worn) and welcomes the variety of appearance brought by individual styles and choices. The wearing of items arising from cultural/religious norms (including, for example: saris, turbans, skullcaps, (including kippah), hijab, mangal sutra and clerical collars) whilst at the Institute is seen as part of this welcome diversity.

4.2 The only limitations to the above are that:

- A placement may require a uniform or protective clothing to be worn, or may place other conditions regarding acceptable dress in the placement. Where such a placement forms a compulsory part of a programme of study, and where the dress code at the placement conflicts with the religious beliefs of a student, the Institute will make all reasonable efforts to find an alternative placement, although this cannot be guaranteed.
- Security and examination requirements may necessitate the temporary removal of garments covering the face in order to verify the identity of the individual staff member, student or visitor. Where requested, such verification will be conducted by a member of staff of the same sex.
- Health and safety requirements may mean that for certain tasks specific items of clothing such as overalls, protective clothing, uniforms, etc. need to be worn. In such circumstances these may be adapted wherever possible to enable the person to wear their religious dress so long as they do not endanger their own health and safety or that of others.
- Where it is determined that a particular form or words, images or symbols is offensive (e.g., racist, sexist or sectarian) then the display of such words, images or symbols is considered to be unacceptable and may be considered a disciplinary offence and be dealt with accordingly.

5. Food Requirements

5.1 The Institute responds positively to requests for food that meets staff and students' dietary requirements (e.g. vegetarian, kosher, halal). Wherever practicable it will provide such food according to demand.