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Wearing the niqaab

Information for IOE staff and students

What is a niqaab?

For the purpose of this document, the niqaab is a veil which covers the face and is worn by some Muslim women, for religious or cultural reasons, as part of the hijab (modest Muslim style of dress or head covering).

Welcoming diversity

Increasingly, educational providers are approached by potential applicants (staff & students) who wish to wear the niqaab, or other clothing that may obscure their face. It is important for the Institute to be able to accommodate this wish wherever possible.

The Institute of Education imposes no overall dress code and welcomes variety of appearance.

All students should be aware of the Institute's Religion and Belief Policy, which can be found on the institute's website:

http://www.ioe.ac.uk/about/documents/About_Policies/Policy_on_Religion_and_Belief.pdf or in the policies and procedures document on Blackboard.

Staff and students may also wish to refer to the following useful document: "Respecting Difference-Good practice guide for PGCE tutors in issues of race, faith and culture": <http://www.ioe.ac.uk/RespectingDifference.pdf>

However staff and students have no absolute right for their beliefs to be accommodated, and the needs of the institution must be balanced with the beliefs of the individual. There is normally no conflict, but where it does arise, the law requires a reasonable compromise to be sought.

Identity

All students and staff at the Institute of Education are required to obtain a photo identity card which shows the face. 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. Anyone asked to remove their face covering must not refuse, and may be denied entry if they do so. A procedure is in place for making this process as sensitive as possible. A private room will be made available (by appointment) in order to undertake identity checks when necessary.

Health and safety

Health and safety requirements also may mean that, for certain tasks, specific items of clothing such as overalls, protective clothing, uniforms, etc. need to be worn or other items removed. In such circumstances items 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. Such arrangements should be agreed between the wearer and the manager of the activity.

Removal of any face covering might also be necessary in the case of a medical emergency.

Reconciling the wearing of the niqaab with identity, and health & safety issues

The Institute of Education believes that it is important to reconcile the needs of women wearing the niqaab with identity and health and safety issues. The following procedures are in place:

Identity issues:

It is the responsibility of any person who wears a niqaab, and who needs an ID card, to make themselves known prior to arrival. They should send a passport style photograph by email to accesscontrol@ioe.ac.uk (subject line: ID card photograph) and an appointment for verification of identity (in a private room with a trained female member of staff) will be arranged prior to production of the student/staff card. (It should be noted that production of the student/staff card will take a little longer in such circumstances.) At this appointment, the signature of the student/staff member will also be captured.

After initial verification, signatures will be used as a subsequent means of identification. (The signature will be captured at the point of initial verification, scanned and deposited in a shared folder that will be made available to appropriate staff.)

In the Library, when it is necessary to prove your identity, eg when borrowing books and making other transactions, it will be necessary to use the student/staff ID card and Library PIN in combination, either at the self service machines or with staff assistance at the Enquiry Desk or Circulation Desk. In the latter case, the Library staff will check that the Library PIN offered by the holder of the card matches that on record in the library system, and may also verify the card holder's ID through a signature check.

Health and safety issues

If the Institute's stance with regard to health and safety produces a conflict with an individual's dress, the individual's line manager or the student's supervisor will, with the aim of finding a satisfactory compromise, sympathetically consider the issue. The responsibility for ensuring that any dress covering does not infringe health and safety guidance will lie with each individual wearer.

First aid assistance to Muslim females

According to MHN (Muslim Health Network), where facilities exist, Islam requires that the administration of First Aid be undertaken by male staff for male patients, and by female staff for female patients. Where this facility does not exist it is preferable that a female member of staff is present when a female patient is examined. The registered IOE first aiders have been made aware of this requirement and will ensure that this is provided wherever possible.

These recommendations are made following consideration of advice received from the Muslim Council of Britain and the Equality Challenge Unit. It also reflects practices in use in other HE institutions. Please see Web-links at the end of this document for more detailed information.

Additional considerations for students and staff involved in ITE, ie PGCE, Teach First and Employment Based routes

As an ITE provider accepting a trainee who wishes to wear the niqaab whilst they are in school and on teaching experience, the Institute needs schools within the partnership that are willing to accept such a trainee for school-based training. This does not include all schools, and trainees need to be aware that this might mean that it is not possible to find a placement school nearby, and that they therefore might be required to travel further afield than other students.

The IOE recognizes its responsibilities in relation to the following requirements for the award of QTS:

R2.4: That their training provision takes account of trainee teachers individual training needs

R2.5: That their training provision ensures equality of access to training for all trainee teachers

(taken from TDA ITT Requirements)

For those who will work in a school in another country as part of ITE training, it is the trainee's responsibility to make contact with the IOE placement officer to make them aware of any particular dress requirement so that a suitable placement can be found.

The IOE is not able to impose a dress code on its partnership schools but takes the view that:

- All have a right to expect respect and accommodation for their religious beliefs, wherever possible;
- Any form of dress should not interfere with the teaching and learning process, including the need for optimum communication between staff and pupils;
- The health and safety of both pupils and staff should be paramount;
- Consultation with staff affected should be an important aspect;
- Each case should be considered on its merits in the light of the principles identified here. Considerations should take into account the need to operate flexibly and within the aims and overall ethos of the school.

(Please see web-link to: NUT report: the Muslim faith and school uniform)

However, individual schools or Local Authorities may have their own policies about staff dress. Some may have decided to discourage the wearing of niqaab in their schools.

Please note that the Institute of Education, as the ITE provider, will not have the authority to insist that such a school accepts a trainee who wishes to wear a face covering. It is not possible for the IOE to ensure that all partnership schools will accommodate all forms of dress. A school may have decided:

- that for child-protection reasons, it is essential to be able to visually identify everyone in the school.
- that face covering is not a religious requirement but a personal choice. (please see web-link: MCB)

- that face to face communication is essential in effective teaching. (please see web link: NUT report, The Muslim Faith and School uniform) and schools may take the view that school staff (and student teachers) should have their faces visible. (This may be seen as particularly relevant with regards to teaching certain children with disability/special needs, who might heavily rely on facial communication. There may also be issues with a particular style of dress when pupils might need some physical support or be able to see certain demonstrations of movement, eg in PE. Please see web-link: TDA Experience of a female Muslim trainee training to teach physical education)

Identity issues

Please note that placement schools who have trainees who wear the niqaab may have their own policy on identification. If they do not, advice from The Muslim Council of Britain indicates that if the identity of a person wearing the niqaab needs to be verified, it would be appropriate for a female member of staff to do so in a private area, and that, as long as the verification was done in a sensitive manner, this should not cause any embarrassment to the student.

Health & Safety issues

There may be health and safety considerations that would restrict certain modes of dress in particular contexts in school (eg Physical Education, Science, Design and Technology). In such cases, the school should consult the person who may be affected by a restriction to see if an appropriate compromise can be reached. For example, it is recommended by the NUT that health and safety issues in science and D&T lessons could be addressed by wearing lab-coats or other protective over coats and wearing smaller headscarves. It is also suggested that if an overall dress is worn as part of the Hijab, it should not be too loose on the arms and be of ankle length to avoid the wearer, or others, tripping on it. Responsibility for ensuring that any dress covering does not infringe health and safety guidance will lie with each individual wearer of religious dress covering.

The NUT does not recommend a formal dress code for staff, and states that staff should be able to dress according to their professional judgement and wishes *unless this is detrimental to their capacity to do their job or is deemed unsafe or inappropriate for some other good reason.*

Developed by Ruth Carter and Sophie Jegado following consultation with a wide range of relevant staff and students/ June 2011

Useful web-links

Institute of Education's Policy on Religion and Belief

http://www.ioe.ac.uk/about/documents/About_Policies/Policy_on_Religion_and_Belief.pdf

Muslim Council of Britain

<http://www.mcb.org.uk/>

MECO. Muslim Educational Centre of Oxford

<http://www.meco.org.uk/>

Muslim Health Network

http://www.muslimhealthnetwork.org/fac_first_aid_cpr.shtml

TDA report: Experience of a female Muslim trainee training to teach Physical Education

http://www.tda.gov.uk/training-provider/itt/qts-standards-itt-requirements/guidance/itt-requirements/training-requirements/individual-training-needs/~/_media/E67A4097672C4C83BC81E8223D606CC9.pdf

NUT Report: The Muslim Faith and School Uniform

<http://www.religionlaw.co.uk/reportcd.pdf>

Equality Challenge Unit

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/subjects/religion-and-belief>

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/your-questions/can-we-ask-students-to-remove-facial-coverings-to-verify-their-identity>

Contacts at the IOE

Security issues:

tbc

Identity issues and comments regarding this document

Ruth Carter, r.carter@ioe.ac.uk

Sophie Jegado, s.jegado@ioe.ac.uk

Health & Safety issues

Michael Smith, m.smith@ioe.ac.uk

Heidi Alderton, h.alderton@ioe.ac.uk