

**UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
DRAFT RELIGION AND BELIEF POLICY**

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## **1. POLICY STATEMENT**

- 1.1 The University of Aberdeen celebrates and values the diversity of its community. In line with its strategic plan, [Aberdeen 2040](#), the University is committed to treating all staff, prospective staff, students, prospective students, Court Members, contractors, suppliers and visitors with dignity and respect. The University seeks to provide a positive working and learning environment free from discrimination, harassment, or victimisation. In accordance with its Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy, the University of Aberdeen will not discriminate against, nor tolerate discrimination or victimisation towards staff, prospective staff, Court members, students, including prospective students, contractors, suppliers or visitors on religious grounds.
- 1.2 The University will seek to create inclusive working and learning environments for staff and students who hold religious or philosophical beliefs. This will include supporting conversations on religion and belief and raising awareness of the diversity of faiths represented in the University.

## **2. DEFINING RELIGION AND BELIEF**

- 2.1 The University of Aberdeen recognises the definition of Religion and Belief as outlined in the Equality Act 2010. Within the Act, the protected characteristic of religion and belief includes any religious, or philosophical belief, or lack of belief. The meaning of religion and belief in the Act is consistent with Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights (which guarantees freedom of thought, conscience and religion).
- 2.2 A religion must have a clear structure and belief system to gain protection as a religion. A belief that is not a religious belief may be a philosophical belief. Examples of philosophical beliefs include Humanism and Atheism. For a philosophical belief to be protected under the Act:
  - It must be genuinely held
  - It must be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on the present state of information available
  - It must be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour
  - It must attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance
  - It must be worthy of respect in a democratic society, not incompatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others

## **3. SCOPE**

- 3.1 The Religion and Belief Policy is applicable to all members of the University community, including:

- All members of staff holding a contract of employment at the University of Aberdeen, including Postgraduate Research Students, prospective staff and staff from other institutions on placement
- All students, including prospective students
- Visitors, including agencies or external individuals using the University's premises or services.
- Individuals acting or working on the University's behalf, including suppliers of goods and services
- Contractors working at the University
- University Court members.

#### **4. LEGAL BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 Religion and belief are listed as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010. Protection under the Act is given to individuals with any religion, or any religious or philosophical beliefs as well as those without a religion or belief. The Act also obliges universities to foster good relations and promote understanding between those who have different characteristics, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) (See Appendix A).
- 4.2 Under the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005, the University of Aberdeen is required to balance its legal duties to ensure good relations and safeguard students with the need to protect freedom of speech and academic freedom. The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 does not change or supersede the Equality Act 2010. Freedom of speech is never a justification for harassment. The University of Aberdeen has adopted the Young Academy of Scotland's Charter for Responsible Debate principles (Appendix B) to support its community to respect differences of opinion and to provide a framework for constructive debate.

#### **5. RESPONSIBILITIES**

##### **5.1 The University will:**

- Treat complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation timeously and sensitively with appropriate confidential monitoring undertaken
- Recognise that an individual's faith or belief may intersect with other protected characteristics
- Raise awareness of this Policy through a range of communication methods
- Treat staff, students and visitors with respect and dignity at all times
- Monitor and review the Policy regularly.

##### **5.2 Staff have the following responsibilities under the Policy:**

- All Staff have a responsibility to comply with this Policy and co-operate with their Line Managers in doing so
- Treat colleagues, students and visitors to the University with respect at all times

- Apply equality, diversity and inclusion principles throughout everyday activities.
- Staff should consult the [Diversity Calendar](#) of religious holidays when planning events or other gatherings.
- Challenge, where safe and appropriate to do so, and/or report behaviour which is discriminatory
- Line managers will ensure the Policy is communicated to their team and will promote equality, diversity and inclusion
- Staff should listen to all requests for adjustment with respect and consideration and where reasonable accommodation can be offered make clear arrangements for this
- Staff should ensure that all deadlines for assessments, dates for trips and dates and details of in course tests are available in course guides at the start of courses.

### **5.3 Students have the following responsibilities under the Policy:**

- Treat other students, staff and visitors to the University with respect at all times
- Challenge, where and appropriate to do so, and/or report behaviour which is discriminatory
- Ensure that they are fully aware of assessment deadlines, course requirements and expectations for attendance
- Students should discuss requests for adjustment in advance of assessments, tests and exams. At least seven days' notice is required where possible in the case of course work and issues should be raised *as soon as possible* in the case of assessments and examinations
- Students have a responsibility to catch up on work missed due to absence on religious grounds to ensure course objectives are met. Students can seek support from their course co-ordinators or Personal Tutor. Where necessary alternative work may be assigned to accommodate absence when a test or presentation is taking place.

## **6. EDUCATION**

The University's diverse student body provides a rich range of perspectives and experiences, and the University will support students for whom a religious faith is part of their identity and personal life.

### **6.1 Assessment**

The University will publish information about assessments in course guides to support the provision of sufficient notice of assessment submission dates. Where these clash with religious festivals and may therefore cause difficulty for a student, a discussion between student and staff is encouraged to ensure that deadlines can be met, and this should take place with at least seven days' notice. Where assessment involves others (e.g., a group project or presentation) alternative forms of assessment may be considered.

## **6.2 Examinations**

The University will publish examination dates in advance, where possible with reference to the University's [Diversity Calendar](#). Regrettably, there may be occasions where examinations clash with religious festivals, or where religious observances such as fasting cause difficulties. A discussion between the student and course co-ordinators as soon as possible and at least seven days in advance of the examination is encouraged to discuss the feasibility of a reasonable adjustment or an alternative arrangement being made.

## **6.3 Field work**

Some courses involve field work, and on occasion this may clash with a religious festival or other event, holidays, weekends, or public holiday. Students who wish to absent themselves from field work on religious grounds should discuss this with both their course tutor and course co-ordinator as soon as possible. A reasonable adjustment will be made where possible, and alternative opportunities or forms of assessment offered. However, in some circumstances, participation is a compulsory element of the course, and it may not always be possible to make adjustments.

## **6.4 Leave for students**

It is unlikely that extended periods of leave for religious events will be possible. Students may discuss such requirements with course or programme co-ordinators or Personal Tutors to explore whether a reasonable adjustment to the Programme of Study can be made.

## **6.5 Proof of identity**

There may be occasions such as at examinations, when a student wearing a full or partial face covering will be required to remove such items of clothing to verify their identity against the photo ID they are required to bring. This will be done in a courteous and appropriate manner in private and by a person of the same sex as the student.

## **6.6 Registration and orientation**

Registration takes place at a specific point in the University calendar. The University will aim to provide alternative arrangements wherever possible for students who have commitments related to religion and belief during this period.

## **6.7 Timetabling**

The University of Aberdeen offers a varied curriculum, and the timetable is designed to deliver teaching as efficiently and effectively as possible. The University understands that there may be instances when a student wishes to be absent due to religious observance. Requests for such absence will be considered and supported where reasonable and practicable. It is the responsibility of the student to catch up on work that is missed. Students may wish to consider this when they are choosing labs, tutorials or seminars and discuss it with course coordinators or Personal Tutors.

## **6.8 Work placement**

Some courses and programmes involve periods of work placement. Students should adhere to the policies and practices of the host organisation when on work placement.

Students who experience discrimination, harassment or victimisation on work placement should inform their course coordinator and be advised of the options available to them. The University will not tolerate unacceptable behaviour towards its students on placement.

## **7. LEAVE FOR STAFF**

The University will adopt a flexible approach towards requests for staff leave for religious celebrations and seeks to accommodate these where possible, subject to sufficient notice of religious observance requirements. Staff may discuss leave requirements with their line manager. Line managers should consider requests carefully and seek to approve leave where possible.

Staff may occasionally be required to work outside of their usual working hours. If a conflict arises with a religious event this should be discussed with the line manager so that a reasonable adjustment can be explored.

## **8. CAMPUS LIFE**

### **8.1 Dietary requirements**

The University is committed to providing catering that meets the requirements of a range of religious and philosophical faiths and endeavours to do so where possible.

### **8.2 Dress code**

The University does not have a dress code for either staff or students with the exception of uniformed staff, staff or students required to wear protective clothing and staff or students who must comply with the dress code in clinical areas. The wearing of slogans and/or symbols that are offensive or degrading to others on the grounds of race, religion, sex or any other protected characteristic is unacceptable and may be considered a disciplinary offence.

### **8.3 Gender segregation**

Gender segregation refers to the enforced separation of men and women at events or meetings. Segregation by gender is not permitted by equality and human rights legislation in universities' normal academic, teaching and research activities. This includes instances arising from different views and beliefs. Segregation of men and women at the University could be accommodated where lawful. For example, in providing separate changing facilities or accommodation. Gender segregation is permitted in premises that are being used for the purposes of an organised religion where its doctrines require it.

The University does not permit compulsory or voluntary segregation in any open or public event or meeting organised in the University's name. This includes speaking events, lectures, academic meetings, or University of Aberdeen meetings which may or not be held on University premises. In line with the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, the rights of individuals will be respected, including the right to hold different views

and beliefs, but the University will not allow these differences to be manifested in ways that discriminate unlawfully.

Limited exceptions under the Equality Act 2010 allow for gender segregation in relation to:

- Communal accommodation
- Sport sessions involving a high degree of physical contact
- Positive action measures adopted by universities as education or service providers (these permit targeted provision in order to overcome or minimise a disadvantage faced by a particular staff or student group or to address low participation by that group).
- Welfare provision which is targeted through single-sex services to meet the distinct needs of men and women.
- Toilets, changing facilities, or any service involving intimate personal health or hygiene.
- Associations, such as student societies, to limit their membership to those who share a protected characteristic. Equality law does not apply to religious worship. Therefore, a religious student society or association may organise a gender segregated event. However, this would only be lawful for the duration of any religious service.

## **9. COMPLAINTS OF DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT**

9.1 The University will take reports and allegations of discrimination, harassment, victimisation or any other relevant complaints seriously and will investigate such complaints, which may result in disciplinary action. Following investigation, allegations of discrimination, harassment or victimisation may result in action being taken up to and including dismissal.

9.2 Staff or students who wish to make a complaint of discrimination, harassment, victimisation, or any other relevant complaint should, if appropriate, direct them initially to their Line Manager, Human Resources Partner or a Student Support Adviser. Formal action can be taken under the Staffing Policy against Discrimination, Harassment and Bullying in the Workplace or through the Student Advice and Support Team. Reports can be made anonymously via the [Online Reporting Tool](#) which also provides an option to connect with an adviser who can discuss available support and progression options.

## **10. UNIVERSITY SUPPORT AND ADVICE**

- There are a number of faith-based student societies. The full list can be found on the [AUSA website](#).
- The [Counselling Service](#) offers online and face to face counselling appointments for both staff and students. Counselling is a talking therapy which provides an opportunity to explore issues which are causing concern or distress.
- The University offers staff an [Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#) which provides a free, confidential face to face and telephone counselling service as well as information

services. The EAP is provided by Care First and staff can contact them about work related or personal issues as well as information, such as legal or financial advice.

- A [Human Resources Partner](#) can support with complex casework such as grievances and dignity at work. [Human Resources Advisers](#) can provide advice on policies and procedures and is a first point of contact for casework.
- Staff are encouraged to discuss issues of discrimination, where appropriate, with their line manager who can signpost to support and support staff to identify a way forward.
- The [Multi-Faith Chaplaincy](#) is open to staff and students from all cultures, faiths, and beliefs and provides pastoral care. Chaplains provide support and advice to members of the community in times of stress, crisis, bereavement, or illness. They are also available for those wishing to explore questions of a personal or confidential nature. The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy operates an open-door policy. [Honorary Chaplains](#) are also available from many different faiths.
- The [Online Reporting Tool](#) can be used to report any incidents or acts of harassment, bullying, violence, targeted hate, or sexual misconduct. All staff, students, and visitors to our campus can report something that has happened to them for recording anonymously or can use the Reporting Tool to access support from an adviser.
- [Personal Tutors](#) can signpost students to specialist support.
- Race Equality Champions are a point of contact for staff and students for advice, guidance, to share ideas or for just a listening ear.
- [School EDI Leads](#) can be contacted regarding matters in their School. They can also signpost to appropriate internal or external information and support.
- [Student Advice and Support](#) can offer advice and support on a range of areas.
- The [Student Helpline](#) is available 24 hours a day and offers free of charge and immediate emotional support.
- The [Workplace Dignity Network](#) provides support to staff who would like to talk through wellbeing concerns. This could be in relation to bullying/harassment, stress, work relationships, work/life balance or mental health issues.

## 11. EXTERNAL SUPPORT AND ADVICE

- [AMINA Muslim Women's Resource Centre](#) is an intersectional organisation that empowers and supports Muslim, Black and Ethnic Minority women. Amina offers a number of services including a helpline and befriending service.
- [CST – Protecting Our Jewish Community](#) has a dedicated team that deals with antisemitic incidents and provides victim support.
- [The Grampian Regional Equality Council](#) offers services including counselling for people affected by discrimination, prejudice and hate crime on the grounds of religion and belief, support and advice for individuals and communities and online reporting for prejudice incidents and discrimination in Aberdeen.
- [Interfaith Scotland](#) is a Scottish charity that specialises in promoting and facilitating constructive engagement between different faith and belief communities across Scotland. They provide a forum for people across different religions to dialogue with one another on matters of religious, national and civic importance. Interfaith Scotland also facilitates dialogues for local interfaith groups, faith communities, young people, women,

religious leaders and members of the general public.

- [Stop Hate UK](#) is an anti-discrimination organisation that operates a free dedicated 24-hour anti-Hate Crime reporting service for all strands of a person's identity or perceived identity, including religion and belief.
- [Tell MAMA](#) provides counselling support to victims of anti-Muslim hate or Islamophobia in addition to the casework, emotional support, legal signposting, advocacy, and court attendance support that Tell MAMA provides to those who experience anti-Muslim hatred or Islamophobia.
- [Union of Jewish Students](#) (UJS) is a voice for Jewish students on campuses across the UK and Ireland. They have a dedicated welfare hotline for support and can be reached via 02074243288.

## 12. PRAYER FACILITIES

The University is committed to supporting staff and students of all religions and beliefs. Faith facilities on campus include:

- [The Aberdeen Mosque and Islamic Centre](#)  
The Aberdeen Mosque and Islamic Centre has moved to Frederick Street, but their former building is located on 164 Spital and is a two-minute walk from the Old Aberdeen Campus. It is still available for staff and students to use as a prayer space.
- [Foresterhill Mosque](#)  
There is a Mosque located to the rear of the Maternity Hospital, near the IM&T building. Friday prayer takes place there at lunchtime and the Mosque is open for regular prayer at any time of the day. For further information contact the Chaplains office at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, tel: 01224 553316
- [King's College Chapel](#) is available for all as a place for contemplation and reflection and as a space where the dignity of humanity may be observed. There is a dedicated quiet hour between 1-2pm every weekday.
- [Multi-Faith Chaplaincy](#)  
The Multi-Faith Chaplaincy operates an open-door policy and is open to staff and students from all cultures, faiths and beliefs and is a place of pastoral care. Chaplains can provide support and advice to members of the community in times of stress, crisis, bereavement, or illness. They are also available for those wishing to explore questions of a personal or confidential nature. [Honorary Chaplains](#) are available if individuals wish to contact someone specifically from their own faith. There is a prayer room available for all staff and students to use within the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy (25 High Street, Old Aberdeen). If this room is busy, then there are other rooms available if not pre-booked.
- [Polwarth Building](#)  
There is a Quiet Space available for all staff and students to use for quiet reflection within the Polwarth Building, room 1.042.
- [Sir Duncan Rice Library](#) has a small room dedicated for prayer on the first floor.
- [Powis Gate Muslim Prayer Room](#)  
The Prayer Room is found on the basement floor of Powis Gate. Access is via a back door facing the entrance to Crombie and requires a University ID card which must be

swiped. There are separate prayer rooms for men and women. For more information, please contact the [Multi-Faith Chaplaincy](#).

- [Roman Catholic Chaplaincy Centre](#) (7 High Street) has a dedicated space and support for religious observance.

A map of the places of worship can be found here: [Places of Worship | About | The University of Aberdeen \(abdn.ac.uk\)](#)

### **13. RELATED POLICIES**

[Antiracism Strategy](#)

[Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy](#)

[Equality Mainstreaming and Outcomes Reports](#)

[Grievance Procedure](#)

[Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy](#)

[Public Sector Equality Duty Report](#)

[Staffing Policy Against Discrimination, Harassment, and Bullying in the Workplace](#)

[Whistleblowing Policy](#)

## **APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS**

### **Associative discrimination**

This is when an individual is treated less favourably because they associate with someone who has a protected characteristic. For example, treating someone less favourably because they spend their spare time socialising with people of a certain religious group despite not sharing the same religious beliefs.

### **Direct Discrimination**

This is when someone is treated less favourably than another on the grounds of a protected characteristic that they identify with. For example, refusing to employ an individual because they are a Muslim.

### **The Equality Act 2010**

The Equality Act 2010 legally protects people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society. It sets out the different ways in which it's unlawful to treat someone. There are nine 'protected characteristics' within the Equality Act 2010 and it is unlawful to discriminate against an individual based on these. Religion and Belief is one of the protected characteristics.

### **The European Convention on Human Rights**

The European Convention on Human Rights states that:

- People have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change religion or belief, or to manifest that religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice or observance.
- The freedom to manifest is subject to limitations as prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

### **The Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005**

Section 26 of this Act provides that institutions must have regard to the desirability of ensuring academic freedom for those who are teaching, providing learning, or engaged in research. The exercise of such freedom must not adversely affect the person's appointment or any entitlements or privileges. In this context, academic freedom includes freedom, within the law, to hold and express ideas, to question and test established ideas and received wisdom, and to present controversial or unpopular points of view.

### **Harassment**

Under the Equality Act 2010, harassment is "unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual".

### **Indirect discrimination**

Occurs when:

1. A practice, provision or criterion is applied to all, and:

2. It puts a group with a protected characteristic at a disadvantage when compared with another group
3. An individual is put at a disadvantage
4. An employer cannot show it to be proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

An example of indirect discrimination could be a uniform policy that requires all individuals to dress in exactly the same way. This may mean that some people cannot wear an item of clothing they regard as part of their faith. This would be indirect discrimination unless the employer could show that the uniform requirement was justified.

### **Perceptive discrimination**

Perceptive discrimination is treating an individual less favourably because it's perceived that they have a protected characteristic, whether they do or not. For example, not recruiting someone because it is assumed they have a certain religious belief when they do not.

### **Public Sector Equality Duty**

The public sector equality duty is a duty on public authorities to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. In carrying out their functions, public authorities must have due regard to the need to achieve the objectives set under the Equality Act 2010. These are to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010.
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The specific duties require the University to:

- Report progress on mainstreaming the equality duty every 2 years
- Publish equality outcomes, and report progress every 2 years
- Assess and review policies and practices against the needs of the general duty
- Publish gender pay gap information to better perform the equality duty
- Publish gender pay gap information and report progress every 2 years
- Publish statements on equal pay and occupational segregation every 4 years
- Consider award criteria and conditions in relation to procurement
- Publish information in a manner which is accessible to the public.

### **Victimisation**

This is when a person is treated less favourably because they have made or supported a complaint or have raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010. Victimisation also applies if it's thought that an individual has made a complaint.

## **APPENDIX B: YOUNG ACADEMY OF SCOTLAND CHARTER FOR RESPONSIBLE DEBATE**

The Young Academy of Scotland proposes nine general principles for responsible public debate. These are grounded in an ideal of informed, respectful and inclusive collective decision-making. This is designed as a starting point to support discussion amongst those who initially disagree, but who listen well to each other in pursuit of common ground and common cause. The principles within the [Charter for Responsible Debate](#) are as follows:

### **Informed**

1. Aim for accuracy and base your contributions on evidence and experience
2. Talk to people with different beliefs, experiences, perspectives and backgrounds
3. Be honest in how you communicate and speak with conviction for what you believe

### **Respectful**

4. Listen carefully, open-mindedly, and with empathy
5. Use emotional language judiciously, avoiding disrespectful or inflammatory language
6. Show appreciation for good points made by others, acknowledging when they change your mind

### **Inclusive**

7. Communicate in ways that unite rather than divide
8. Try to address imbalances in power, knowledge and accessibility
9. Seek to identify common ground and shared purpose.

<b>Title</b>	Religion and Belief Policy
<b>Author / Creator</b>	Ceit Mackintosh, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Adviser, Human Resources
<b>Owner</b>	Janine Chalmers, Head of Organisational Development, Human Resources
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<b>Subject / Description</b>	The Religion and Belief Policy sets out the University of Aberdeen's approach to preventing discrimination against staff, prospective staff, Court members, students, including prospective students, contractors, suppliers or visitors on religious grounds.
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