

## UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN POLICY AND GUIDANCE ON RELIGION AND BELIEF (STUDENT ISSUES)

### 1. DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY STATEMENT

The University of Aberdeen is committed to a comprehensive policy on Equality and Diversity for all its staff and students. This aims to prevent discriminatory practices and to create a culture where staff and students can reach their full potential.

The University is committed to selecting and treating staff and students on the basis of their merits only and irrespective of colour, race, nationality, national origins, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, family circumstances, political beliefs, gender, gender reassignment, trade union membership, age or any other unfair distinction.

The University is also committed to providing a learning, working and social environment in which the rights and dignity of all its members are respected, and which is free from discrimination, prejudice, intimidation and all forms of harassment and bullying. It recognises that religious and cultural diversity enriches the learning environment for all staff and students and aims to provide a learning community where the dignity, rights and beliefs of all members are respected and valued.

### 2. UNIVERSITY RESPONSIBILITIES

The University developed this Policy and Guidelines in compliance with the relevant legislation, specifically the Equality Act 2010. It also aims to support the broader ethos of this legislation. The Policy was updated to reflect guidance on Gender Segregation provided to the Higher Education sector by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2014 and updated in 2018 to incorporate information about faith facilities and to include a preference for a 7-day notice period in relation to students requesting adjustments to teaching and learning due to religious observance.

The University will aim to ensure that:

- All staff and students are made aware of the Religion and Belief Policy and Guidelines through web pages, publications and, where necessary, training.
- Information about religious festivals and other key issues relevant to faith is available on web pages so that staff and students can make informed decisions regarding reasonable adjustments.
- The diversity of the University is reflected in its publicity materials and web sites.

In addition it will adhere to the following guidelines on matters of religion and belief:

### 3. CAMPUS LIFE

Support for Religion and Belief: The University is committed to supporting students of all faiths and none. Faith facilities on campus include:

#### **Old Aberdeen Campus**

**Powis Gate Prayer Room:** The Prayer Room is found on the basement floor of Powis Gate (this is the lower floor with respect to main entrance, but the ground floor from the back),

and is next to the music practice rooms. Access is via a back door facing the entrance to Crombie, and requires a University ID card which must be swiped.

**Multi-Faith Chaplaincy:** There is a quiet room available for all staff and students to use for prayer located 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. Please check with Multi-Faith Chaplaincy administrative staff to check if the room is free.

Prayer spaces within the Old Aberdeen Campus are managed by the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy. Contact details: email: [chaplaincy@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:chaplaincy@abdn.ac.uk), tel: 01224 272137

### **Foresterhill Campus**

**Foresterhill Mosque:** There is a Mosque on the Foresterhill Site, 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. However, the Friday prayer is only held at the Mosque facility. For further information contact the Chaplains office at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary, tel: 01224 553316

**Polwarth Building:** There is a Quiet Space available for all staff and students to use for quiet reflection within the Polwarth Building, room 1.131. For further information please contact Lynn Lumsden: email [l.lumsden@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:l.lumsden@abdn.ac.uk), tel: 01224 437503.

In addition there are dedicated spaces and support for religious observance at the Mosque (164 Spital), the Muslim Prayer Room (Powis Gate) and at the Roman Catholic Chaplaincy Centre (7 High Street). 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. A map of where these places of worship are located can be found at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/maps/worship.php>.

**Dress Code:** The University does not have a dress code for either staff or students with the exception of uniformed staff, those required to wear protective clothing and those who must comply with the dress code in clinical areas including the clinical skills teaching area. However, it should be noted that clothing which carries offensive or racist slogans may be in breach of the University's Diversity and Inclusion policy and / or equality legislation. There may also be occasions where specific circumstances related to particular courses mean that some forms of dress are deemed inappropriate. Where issues arise these should be discussed by the student and course co-ordinator and advice sought from the University Equality and Diversity Adviser ([janine.chalmers@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:janine.chalmers@abdn.ac.uk)).

**Dietary Requirements:** The University is committed to providing catering that meets the requirements of a range of faiths. Any suggestions regarding the ways this provision can be enhanced should be sent to Campus Services at [campusnews@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:campusnews@abdn.ac.uk).

**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. Except in narrow circumstances outlined below, gender segregation will be unlawful at any meeting or event held on the University premises, where staff, students or members of the public are attending. When arranging, facilitating or conducting meetings or events, or when issuing an invitation to speak at or attend an event, equality law prohibits universities,

students' unions and student societies from discriminating (either directly or indirectly or harassing) against students, staff or guests. Any seating arrangement amounts to direct discrimination if it results in disadvantage to any participant. Any pressure placed on a woman to sit separately from men (or vice versa) by the university, the event organiser or an external speaker would amount to unlawful harassment. 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 e.g. gender or religion and belief.

Equality law does not apply to religious worship. Therefore, a religious student society or association may organise a gender segregated event, but this would only be lawful for the duration of any religious service. Once the event or meeting goes beyond religious worship, equality law will apply and therefore gender segregation is likely to be unlawful.

#### 4. TEACHING AND LEARNING

The University expects all students to take responsibility for their academic work and academic progress and to ensure that they meet all necessary requirements of assessment, attendance and participation. Any student who is unclear about what is required of him/her should speak with the course tutor, course co-ordinator or personal tutor.

However, the University also recognises that there may be circumstances where students may request absence or adjustment on the grounds of religious observance and where this is the case reasonable adjustments may be made. It is imperative that any requests for such adjustment are made in advance (at least 7 days' notice is required where possible) as retrospective accommodation cannot be made.

**Registration and Orientation:** Registration takes place at a specific point in the University calendar and it is very difficult for this to be moved. The University will aim to provide alternative arrangements wherever possible for those who have commitments related to religion and belief during this period.

**Timetabling:** The University of Aberdeen offers a diverse and varied curriculum and the timetable is designed to deliver teaching as efficiently and effectively as possible. As a consequence of this it is impossible to accommodate the broad diversity of religious observance requirements across the institution. However, the University is aware that there may be occasions when a student wishes to be absent due to religious observance. Occasional requests for such absence will be treated sympathetically and where possible reasonable adjustment made. It is the student's responsibility to catch up on any work that

is missed as a consequence. Students should consider this when they are choosing frequently occurring events such as labs, tutorial or seminars.

**Field Work:** Some courses may involve field work and this may take place in vacations, weekends and on public holidays. Students who wish to absent themselves from such work on religious grounds should discuss this with both their course tutor and co-ordinator. Where possible reasonable adjustments will be made and alternative opportunities or forms of assessment offered. At times, however, participation is a compulsory element of the course and it will not always be possible to make adjustments.

**Work Placement:** Some Courses and Programmes involve periods of work placement. When students are on work placements they should adhere to the policies and practices of the host organisation (although these will also be covered by equality legislation). Students should ensure they are clear about these policies and practices before agreeing to a particular work placement.

**Assessment:** Assessment deadlines are published in course guides well in advance of submission dates. Where these clash with religious festivals it is the responsibility of the student to organise work efficiently so that deadlines can be met. Where assessment involves others (e.g. a group project or presentation) alternative forms of assessment may be considered.

**Examinations:** All examination dates are published in advance. Where examinations clash with religious festivals, or where religious observances such as fasting cause difficulties, it is the responsibility of the student to speak to course co-ordinators well in advance of the examination to see if a reasonable adjustment or alternative arrangement can be made.

**Leave:** It is not normally possible to take extended leave for religious events. However students may discuss such requirements with course or programme co-ordinators, Heads of School or Personal Tutors to explore whether a reasonable adjustment to the Programme of Study can be made.

**Complaints:** Any complaint of discrimination or unfair treatment in matters of religion and belief should be made in the first instance to the Head of School following the normal complaints procedures. These can be found at: <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/student-support/complaints.php>.

Please Note: Retrospective information regarding religious observance and absence will not be considered grounds for appeal and it is the responsibility of the student to ensure that all requests for adjustment or alternative arrangements are made in advance and in a timely fashion i.e. at least 7 days before the event.

## 5. RESPONSIBILITIES IN BRIEF

For Staff

- Staff should make themselves familiar with this policy
- Staff should consult the on-line calendar of religious festivals where necessary

- 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

#### For Students

- Students should ensure that they are fully aware of assessment deadlines, course requirements and expectations for attendance
- Students should discuss requests for adjustment in good time (at least 7 days in advance where possible) and ahead of the dates when assessments, tests and exams are scheduled
- Students should recognise that it is their responsibility to catch up on any work missed due to absence on religious grounds and that where necessary alternative work may be assigned to accommodate absence when a test or presentation is taking place.

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