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**Kingston  
University**  
London

## **Academic Policy 11:**

# **Religion and Belief Policy**

## **2024-2025**

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## Section 1

### Introduction

1. Kingston University is a secular institution which has no commitment to any particular faith or belief. The University is committed to providing a supportive and safe environment in which students can engage successfully with all aspects of university life irrespective of their religion, belief or non-belief.
2. The primary aim of students is to study, and the University recognises that the spiritual and moral systems that religion or belief offer can be of fundamental importance to the well-being and success of students. This policy, therefore, provides guidance to students, and those staff responsible for aspects of their education and welfare, on how the needs of students, with respect to religion and belief are to be met. The policy does not intend to be comprehensive; rather it addresses some important questions that may arise in this context.

### Policy Scope

3. This policy covers all students at Kingston University and relates to all aspects of their studies within the University.

## Section 2

### Definitions

4. The [Equality Act 2010](#) defines religion or belief as “any religion and any religious or philosophical belief. It also includes a lack of any such religion or belief”. For a belief to be protected by the Equality Act:
  - It must be genuinely held.
  - It must be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on information available at the moment.
  - 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. It must be compatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others.
5. In defining what is reasonable, Kingston University seeks to balance the religion or belief needs of a student with the legitimate needs of the University and the interests of others. Wherever possible the University will try and explore a flexible approach for students to facilitate faith practice. As some agreed flexibilities will take time to be arranged, both staff and students should agree a reasonable timeframe for these to be discussed and approved.
6. To reach a fully considered, balanced, and reasonable conclusion, the University should consider, amongst other factors:
  - The cost, disruption and wider impact on business or work if the request is accommodated.
  - Whether there are health and safety implications for the proposed change.
  - The disadvantage(s) to the affected student if the request is refused.
  - The impact of any change on other employees or students, including on those who have a different religion or belief, or no religion or belief.

## Section 3

### Academic Freedom and Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion

7. Kingston University is an academic institution that places high value on open and reasoned debate. The University recognises the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. These rights are absolute, but manifestations of these beliefs are not. The right to manifest a belief may be qualified by the need to show respect for the differing worldviews, lifestyles and identities of others. The University has an over-arching responsibility to promote pluralism and tolerance and will seek to intervene in instances where manifestations of a belief constitute harassment or create conflict that goes beyond open and reasoned debate.
8. Guest speakers can be invited to speak on campus within the framework set out in the University's [Freedom of Speech Policy](#) and where relevant the guest speakers should be made aware of the provisions of this policy.

## Section 4

### Timetabling

9. The University must ensure that timetables operate efficiently and effectively to deliver learning, teaching and assessment requirements within the available space and time. For these reasons the University cannot guarantee to avoid clashes between academic timetabling and religious observance or commitments. The University understands that there may be certain occasions when a student may be absent due to religious observance. It is expected that this will not be a common occurrence.
  
10. When making decisions about requests for late entry into learning and teaching sessions, the Personal Tutor/Research Supervisor will consider agreed practices relating to late arrivals. If a student is missing a lecture on a regular basis due to their religious observance and timetabling permits, it may be reasonable to move the student to another group. It would not however be reasonable to move a student or accept an absence solely because the student would prefer to work with a different group of people.

## Section 5

### General

#### Religious Observance and Assessment

11. Students who are making an application for academic flexibility due to religious observance in relation to their assessment should follow the [Mitigating Circumstances Procedure](#) (AR5).

#### Gender Segregation and Study

12. The University does not permit gender segregation in learning and teaching activities. It does recognise that there are exceptions such as positive action schemes which are specifically designed to address inequalities.

#### Religious Clothing

13. **Learning Environment:** The University welcomes the diversity of different attire worn by its students. In particular situations some students will not be able to wear certain religious dresses due to health and safety considerations and/or to the need for communication between individuals. This may especially apply, for example, in medical and laboratory-based disciplines. In order 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 regulations will be given priority over the need for religious expression.
14. **Examinations:** The University requires proof of identity for all students entering an examination venue. This is done by carrying out a visual check against photographic ID issued by the University. In order to verify the identity of individual female students with a facial covering, the University will endeavour to make available a female member of staff (including invigilators) to perform this check in a private area. If a female staff member is not available, then if necessary, female students must be prepared to unveil for a male member of staff performing any such check.

#### Work Placements

15. When students are on work placements, 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.

## Student Environment

16. **University owned student accommodation:** Shared kitchens in most university student accommodation offers adequate facilities for specific dietary needs and food preparation. The University does not provide designated single sex accommodation.
17. **Dedicated multi-faith and contemplation service at the University:** Students can pray or engage in quiet reflection or meditation in spaces identified by the Faith and Spirituality Service at the University.
18. **Food and drink:** The University has outlets which sell a variety of food options. Most of these outlets have vegetarian and vegan options and some stock kosher and halal foods. Events organised by Kingston will have vegetarian options when food is provided. Some events serve alcohol but there will always be non-alcoholic drinks provided. To enable students to make informed decisions about what they eat, food should be labelled clearly to indicate where it may be suitable for special dietary needs, and during preparation and storage meat should be kept separate from vegetarian food.

## Discrimination Arising from Religion or Belief

19. Staff and students are expected to behave considerately at all times as members of the University community and to respect the rights of others.
20. Kingston University will take firm action where anyone uses language, treatment or behaviour which discriminates against any other person on the grounds of their religion, belief or non-belief. Kingston University has a range of [support](#) and [report routes](#) available if you have experienced or witnessed any behaviour that makes you feel uncomfortable. You can also speak to your Personal Tutor/Research Supervisor and/or speak confidentially and informally to a [Harassment Contact](#).
21. Formal processes for dealing with religious discrimination or harassment are:
  - Instances of harassment or discriminatory behaviour by students are formally dealt with through the [Student Conduct and Behaviour Procedure](#)
  - Students may wish to make a formal complaint of discrimination or harassment relating to staff conduct and may do so through the [Student Complaints Procedure](#).
22. Experiencing discrimination or harassment can significantly impact a person's mental health. Support for students is available from the [Student Wellbeing Team](#).



## Section 6

### Related Resources and support

23. [Mitigating Circumstances Procedure](#)
24. There are a number of [faith societies](#) run by the Union of Kingston Students
25. There is a University Senior Faith Adviser and a multi-faith team of [voluntary faith advisers](#), all of whom are available for [advice, support and prayer](#) to students and staff of any religious or non-religious background.