

Student Religion and Belief Policy

Introduction

Brunel University London welcomes all students who have or do not have a religion or belief, and aims to provide a respectful, enabling and inclusive culture in which all students have access to the same opportunities to reach their full potential and have a positive student experience.

The University is committed to meeting its public sector equality duty by:

- eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited
- advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not
- fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The University celebrates and values the breadth of diversity across its student population and is committed to supporting all students irrespective of their personal, social or cultural characteristics and aims to create an environment where religious beliefs are welcomed and respected. Whilst Brunel does not have any religious affiliation and does not endorse any particular faith or denomination, it does recognise the personal commitment of some members of its community to pursue a religious or spiritual practice and supports their right to do so. It also appreciates that this practice may come with a set of obligations / religious observances and where practical the University will provide support, facilities and information to support those individuals. Similarly, it also recognises that other members of the community will not have a religion or belief and supports their rights to not to.

Scope

This policy provides information and guidance to prospective and registered students who have or do not have a religion or belief at any stage of the student cycle. This includes from application stage throughout their studies to graduation.

In addition, the policy aims to provide advice and guidance to University employees about working with students who have or do not have a religion or belief including in relation to study (learning, assessment and examinations), research, academic freedom, provision of facilities and services, religious observance, dress and support.

Policy Statement

Brunel University London believes that all students should have the same opportunities to succeed in their studies or research regardless of whether they have, or do not have a religion or belief. The University commits to ensuring that:

- students are not threatened or discriminated against or disadvantaged because they either have or do not have a religion or belief, whether it be from a fellow student, a University employee or a supplier, contractor or visitor to the University.
- all members of the University community are treated equally and fairly with respect and dignity.
- harassment, bullying and hate crime against students who have or who do not have a religion or belief will not be tolerated. Robust procedures are provided for students in Senate Regulation 6 and for staff in the Staff Disciplinary Policy and Procedures s.3 to deal with any allegations of harassment and bullying in a fair, impartial and timely fashion.
- all reasonable steps are taken to ensure that the University meets its public sector equality duties including for religion and belief.
- the whole University community is made aware of this policy and their responsibilities to which they are expected to comply.
- where reasonably practicable, appropriate facilities and services are provided to meet the religious needs of all students.
- employees are aware of their responsibilities to all students with or without a religion or belief and that any issues are addressed in a respectful and inclusive way.
- a communications plan is developed to launch and disseminate this policy to students and employees across the University.

Legal Context

This policy incorporates the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 which provides protection for individuals from discrimination, and makes it unlawful to harass or discriminate someone on the grounds of religion or belief, or where they have no religion or belief. For further information on Brunel's Bullying and Harassment Policy, see [Bullying and Harassment Policy \(brunel.ac.uk\)](http://brunel.ac.uk).

The legislation states that 'religion' means any religion although does not provide a definition. However, the judiciary have interpreted this as any religion which is of sufficient seriousness and has a clear structure and belief system such as Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Jainism and Rastafarianism. It does not need to be well known or mainstream to be protected by the Act. Denominations or systems of belief within a religion are also likely to be considered religions under the Act such as Methodism with Christianity, or Sunni or Shia within Islam. The Act also protects people with a belief such as a humanist, atheist or secularist but does not provide a definition apart from any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of a particular belief. The judiciary have interpreted this to not necessarily include a belief in a god / gods but must be genuinely held, about a significant aspect of human life and behaviour, be worthy of respect in a democratic society and affect how an individual sees the world or lives their life. Examples include humanism, vegetarianism and pacifism.

As part of the Public Sector Equality Duty, the University is responsible for proactively fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This includes people who have different religions or beliefs, or who do not have a religion or belief, and will involve creating

an environment where positive relationships can exist and which encourages positive dialogue, along with managing and / or avoiding tensions between different groups and those with other protected characteristics such as sexuality, gender identity and disability. The University is also required to tackle prejudice and promote understanding between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

Individuals are also protected by Article 9 of the Human Rights Act 1998 which covers freedom of thought, conscience and religion and gives individuals the absolute right to hold or change a particular religion or belief and that they have a qualified right to manifest that religion or belief such as in dress or how they behave. It includes all religion and a wide range of philosophical beliefs including veganism, agnosticism and atheism. There could be some situations when the right might be limited so as to protect public safety and the rights and freedoms of others.

The Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006) specifically expanded the Public Order Act (1986) to ensure 'stirring up hatred against persons on religious grounds' is prohibited in England and Wales.

Freedom of Belief

Brunel takes its commitment to freedom of belief very seriously but only when it is lawful and those concerned exhibit a degree of tolerance and patience towards views in opposition of to their own but also support group concept of rational debate. Access to University premises or facilities both on campus and online should not be denied based on lawful belief and members of the University should be able to go about their business without fear of intimidation. However, there may be situations when the University needs to set limits on certain freedoms in order to preserve the rights and freedoms of others. For further details, see [Code of Practice to Ensure Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Expression 2019/20 \(brunel.ac.uk\)](#).

Admissions and Enrolment

Brunel is committed to ensuring that our admissions procedures are conducted fairly and consistently for all students including those with or without a religion or belief. It is important that all staff involved are aware not to discriminate against applicants on grounds of religion or belief, or to make offers based on their religion or belief. New students may have particular needs and / or concerns related to their religion or belief and they should be encouraged to seek information and advice on the support they need relating to religion or belief. For further information, see [Faith & spirituality \(brunel.ac.uk\)](#) and [Book an appointment for Student Support & Welfare \(brunel.ac.uk\)](#).

When students complete the online enrolment process at Brunel, they will be asked to provide passport verification and to have their photograph taken for their student ID cards. If they wear a face covering they will need to remove it for verification purposes and arrangements will be made with the individual student to do this in a sensitive appropriate way.

Teaching and Learning

The University seeks to ensure that all its teaching, learning and assessment are informed by an understanding of issues of equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to religion, belief and non-belief. Academic staff members are committed to taking an inclusive approach to their curriculum design and delivery, including their use of resources, sites and platforms and by engaging with students to raise awareness of different religions and beliefs and generating challenging discussion and debate as part of respectful enquiry. For full details on the University's inclusive toolkit for academics, see [Individual inclusive learning and teaching toolkit](#).

Timetabling

Brunel has a common timetable which aims to ensure that teaching and learning requirements are delivered efficiently and effectively within the time and space available. This is normally 8.00 am to 8.00 pm Monday to Friday although the University endeavours to schedule the majority of classes between 9.00 am to 6.00 pm. Every effort will be made not to schedule teaching during prayer hour on a Friday between 1.00 pm – 2.00 pm or on Wednesday afternoons although this may not always be possible. However, apart from this exception, it will not be possible to accommodate the diversity of religious observance requirements within the timetable although every effort is made to provide facilities for religious observance (see below). As such students will be expected to attend teaching and learning events when they are scheduled.

The University does recognise that there may be an exceptional circumstance when a student might be absent due to religious observance, although this must not be a regular occurrence. If such a situation does arise, they should contact their department to see if alternative arrangements can be made although this may not always be possible. However this should not interfere with the standard of the student's work, or any attendance requirements. For further information on Timetabling, see [Timetabling and Examinations \(brunel.ac.uk\)](https://www.brunel.ac.uk/timetabling).

Some departments / divisions may schedule field classes during weekends, vacation periods and public holidays. Students who might require a leave of absence from this type of activity on religious grounds should discuss this in advance and request permission from both their tutor and head of department although it should be noted that alternative provision may not always be possible.

If a student is undertaking a work placement, they should liaise with their Placement Provider to make local arrangements. For further information, see <https://students.brunel.ac.uk/documents/Policies/edi-student-work-placement-policy-2021.pdf>.

Assessments

Assessment deadlines are given in advance to students, and students who are observing religious observance or festivals around the time of the deadline will need to plan their work so that it is completed in good time. It is not University practice to consider such a situation under the Extenuating Circumstance Policy where “a significant event negatively affects a student’s ability to submit work, attend an assessment or perform to their usual standard in an assessment of any type. It should be unavoidable, unexpected and beyond the control of the student.” A student should discuss any issues with their department in advance. For further details, see [Extenuating Circumstances Guidance for Students \(brunel.ac.uk\)](https://www.brunel.ac.uk/Extenuating-Circumstances-Guidance-for-Students).

Examinations

The University will not be able to reschedule an exam or assessment because of a religious celebration on that day due to the variety of faiths and the need to run exams in accordance with the University’s set academic calendar. Brunel aims to provide a fair and consistent approach for all students. For more information, see [Timetabling and Examinations \(brunel.ac.uk\)](https://www.brunel.ac.uk/Timetabling-and-Examinations). If a student needs further advice regarding an examination or an assessment, they should speak with their Department or the Student Support and Welfare Team.

Where students do have examinations or assessments scheduled, they should arrange to pray either before or after as appropriate.

When students sit examinations, verification of their identity may be required. Any candidate wearing religious dress that covers their face may need their ID checked at the end of the examination, privately and by a female invigilator. For online assessments where external accrediting bodies require identification via facial recognition, the student should make a local arrangement with their department to ensure that their identity can be verified in a sensitively appropriate way.

Chaplaincy

Brunel provides a chaplaincy service which is based in the Meeting House to support the diverse spiritual and religious needs of both students and staff throughout the week. The Meeting House is the place of hospitality and support. It has a very flexible setting, with tables and chairs, which can be used for meetings, social gatherings and religious services. It also has a ‘Quiet’ room, a small space for moments of meditation and quiet reflection. Finally, all chaplains are available for the University’s Listening Service which offers support to those who need a conversation and prayer in a difficult time. For more information, please see [Faith & spirituality \(brunel.ac.uk\)](https://www.brunel.ac.uk/Faith-and-spirituality).

Religious Observance / Prayer

The University will make every reasonable effort to provide suitable space for prayer, quiet contemplation and ablution where practical and will provide information about this provision. Students should only use these designated spaces for their religious

observance or prayer as they need to be considerate of the effect that they might have on others and be sensitive to those. For further detail about current provision, please see [Faith & spirituality \(brunel.ac.uk\)](https://www.brunel.ac.uk/faith-spirituality).

Food

Brunel has a range of outlets which provide / sell a variety of food options including vegetarian and vegan and halal foods. Events organised by Brunel will provide vegetarian and vegan options in observance of different religious dietary practices. Other catering requirements will be considered as needed. For further support, please contact the Meeting House in the first instance at [Faith & spirituality \(brunel.ac.uk\)](https://www.brunel.ac.uk/faith-spirituality). The University will be sensitive to the needs of members of its community who do not consume alcohol and will provide alcohol-free catering and social spaces to meet religious and / or associated cultural dietary requirements.

Dress

Brunel does not impose a dress code on the university community and welcomes the diversity of dress and individual style including items which may be associated with particular religious beliefs and associated cultural practices. There may be certain situations in students' teaching when it might not be appropriate to wear particular religious dress, such as for health and safety reasons in laboratory-based disciplines where protective clothing may also need to be worn. If such clothing leads to a conflict with a student's religious belief, they should liaise with the tutor responsible for the activity who will seek a satisfactory solution. However, Health, Safety and Security will be paramount. For guidance on individual cases contact the Health and Safety Team at <https://intra.brunel.ac.uk/safety/Pages/default.aspx>. When undertaking a work placement, a student must adhere to any local dress codes determined by the providers.

Support

The University provides practical guidance and support to students with or without different religions and / or beliefs and this can be accessed through the Student Support and Welfare Team either face to face by visiting the Student Centre or via phone: 01895 267045 or email: studentsupport@brunel.ac.uk. Should students encounter any barriers to their experience at Brunel as a result of / or connected to their religion or belief, or non-belief, they are also encouraged to contact the Student Support and Welfare Team for advice and guidance. If staff need any advice or information to support their students, they can contact the Student Equality and Diversity Manager via <https://staff.brunel.ac.uk/directorates/sas/student-equality-diversity-and-inclusion>.

Disclosure and Confidentiality

No student is under any obligation to disclose whether they have a religion or belief or no belief, although they are asked this as part of the University's registration task. The information shared is kept as confidential data and is used to ensure that the University provides appropriate services and facilities for students with different social and cultural characteristics. The University also uses the data to monitor that

there is no differentiation in student outcomes, such as continuation, awards and progression for students of particular religions or beliefs, or for those with no religious belief.

Bullying and Harassment

The University does not tolerate any forms of harassment or bullying, including where it is related to a student's religion or belief, or where a student has no belief. Any harassment could be regarded as grounds for a complaint under the Bullying and Harassment Policy. For further detail, see - [Bullying and Harassment Policy \(brunel.ac.uk\)](#). Students are encouraged to seek help as soon they can, to obtain advice about possible options for action and / or access appropriate support. Students can do this either via their Tutor, Supervisory Team and / or the Student Support and Welfare Team or by using Report and Support at [Report + Support - Brunel University London](#).

As far as possible, confidentiality will be maintained where reports of bullying and harassment are made. Where it is necessary to interview witnesses, the importance of confidentiality will be emphasised. It should be explained to everyone involved in the process that any breach of confidentiality may lead to disciplinary action. Students should, however, be aware that there are times when confidentiality will need to be broken due to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. For example, confidentiality may need to be waived in the event of an identified risk, or where there is a live criminal investigation where individuals may be required to give evidence. A member of staff will also need to raise any reports of bullying or harassment with their relevant College Education Manager or Student Support and Welfare Manager, and other staff as appropriate.

Complaints

If you feel that the University has failed to comply with this policy, you may raise your concerns using the University's Complaints Procedure. For more information see - [Student complaints, conduct and appeals \(brunel.ac.uk\)](#). The Complaints Procedure cannot be used to appeal against a decision of a Board of Examiners for which you should instead refer to Senate Regulation 12 and accompanying guidance.

For more information about this policy, please contact the Student Support and Welfare Team either by phone on 01895 267045 or email studentsupport@brunel.ac.uk.