

# Religion and Belief at CCCU

## Policy and Guidance for Students and Staff

		Page
1	University Context	2
2	Purpose of Policy and Guidance	2
3	Policy Framework	2
4	What is a Religion?	3
5	What is a Belief?	3
6	Freedom of Thought and Expression	3
7	Religious Dress	4
8	Religious Festivals, Holy Days and Prayer	4
9	Examinations and Assessments	5
10	Dietary Requirements	5
11	Work Placements	6
12	Provision for Religion and Belief at CCCU	6
13	Sources of Further Information	6

# Religion and Belief at CCCU

## Policy and Guidance for Students and Staff

### 1. University Context

Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) was founded by the Church of England in 1962 and it remains a Church of England Foundation. At CCCU, the Anglican tradition (together with other systems of faith) is understood to affirm the unique worth and dignity of every human being, irrespective of religion and belief. The University seeks to welcome, understand, appreciate and support all its students and staff, whatever their religions and/or beliefs.

### 2. Purpose of Policy and Guidance

Religion and belief can be of fundamental importance to wellbeing; and religious practices such as prayer, diet and dress are often integral parts of religious life. It is important therefore that, where reasonably practicable, the needs of those from all religious backgrounds and those with no religious affiliation are met. It is also important to be clear when religious requirements may impinge upon the needs and freedoms of others, occasionally to the point where they cannot be accommodated.

This document outlines the University's policy in relation to religion and belief and provides guidance on how all students and staff are expected to appreciate and accommodate each other's needs in this respect. The policy is not comprehensive, but addresses some important issues that may arise. If further guidance is needed, please contact the Equality and Diversity Manager or a member of the Chaplaincy Team.

### 3. Policy Framework

This policy covers any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief, but it does not cover political belief. It is informed by the Equality Act 2010 which outlaws direct and indirect discrimination against a person on the grounds of their religion or belief. It also prohibits harassment and victimisation on the grounds of religion and belief as well as discrimination by perception and by association. This means it is unlawful to discriminate against someone because you believe them to have a particular religion or belief (regardless of whether or not they hold that belief) or because they are associated with someone who holds a particular religion or belief.

## **4. What is a Religion?**

There is no exhaustive list of religions but here are some examples: Baha'i faith; Buddhism; Christianity; Druidry, Paganism and Wicca; Hinduism; Islam; Judaism; Sikhism.

Denominations and groups of denominations within a religion such as Catholicism and Protestantism are also considered as religions or religious beliefs. Less prominent faiths such as Shintoism are also covered by the Equality Act and there is no stipulation as to how many followers a faith requires in order to qualify. Requests from people with less well-known religious beliefs should be treated with the same respect as those from people with more well-known religions or beliefs.

## **5. What is a Belief?**

A belief is more difficult to define than a religion but case law suggests that to be protected under the Equality Act, a philosophical belief must:

- Be genuinely held
- Be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on the present state of information available
- Be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour
- Attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance
- Be worthy of respect in a democratic society and not incompatible with human dignity or conflict with the fundamental rights of others

Examples that have been upheld under the Equality Act have concerned such areas as environmentalism, vegetarianism and commitment to animal rights. In general and providing they are reasonable, requests relating to philosophical beliefs should be treated with the same respect as those related to religion.

## **6. Freedom of Thought and Expression**

CCCU is a university that values freedom of thought, conscience and religion, and encourages open and reasoned debate. However, the manifestation of freedom of thought, conscience and religion is not an absolute right and intervention may be justified where this is considered necessary to protect the rights of others as set out in equality legislation.

The University recognises that it has a positive obligation to promote respect and tolerance and therefore that no group or person has the right to act in a way that infringes the lawful rights of others. As with other protected characteristics under the Equality Act, discrimination will be dealt with under the University's disciplinary procedures.

## **7. Religious Dress**

The University does not seek to impose a dress code on its students or staff, other than in situations where it is necessary to wear protective clothing and/or a uniform. Members of staff are expected to ensure that their dress is appropriate for the situation in which they are working and that it supports the presentation of a professional image.

Wherever possible, students and staff should be able to wear religious dress should they wish, so long as they do not endanger their own health and safety or that of others. Where issues arise, every effort should be made to reach a mutually acceptable solution. However the need to comply with health and safety will be given priority over the need for religious expression.

When staff or students are on work placements the relevant organisational codes will apply and must be complied with. Security and examination requirements may mean that students have to be visually authenticated against their ID cards. If headwear covers the face, the temporary removal of such items may be necessary on occasions. In such cases the removal of headwear will be done in an appropriate location by a staff member of the same sex.

## **8. Religious Festivals, Holy Days and Prayer**

Requests for annual leave at times of religious significance (which may vary from year to year) should be treated sympathetically and accommodated wherever possible, provided there is no detriment to the University's business. If necessary and practicable, adjustments could include time off in lieu (TOIL), unpaid leave, and/or flexible working arrangements.

CCCU will not normally allow students to take extended leave for religious events during term time. However, students can make a formal request to their tutor within a reasonable timeframe providing justification for their request. Consideration will be on a case-by-case basis.

Whilst ensuring there is no detriment to the University or others, managers and academic staff should make every attempt to ensure that those whose religion requires them to pray at certain times during the day are enabled to do so through agreed flexible working and studying arrangements. The places provided by the University for religious practice are listed in section 12.

Effort should also be made to accommodate requests from those who require variations in their hours of work (for example, an extra hour at midday on Friday, or not to work beyond sunset on Friday) as long as this complies with the requirements in their contract. Similar requests from students should also be considered sympathetically.

Religious obligations around such issues as birth, coming of age, marriage and death can vary according to religion, culture and position in the family. Those responsible for granting the requests of both staff and students should bear this in mind and consult the Equality and Diversity Unit if unsure what to do.

The University teaching timetable is designed to make best use of the available time and space. This means that the timetable cannot always accommodate the religious observance requirements of all students and staff. The University appreciates that occasionally a student may wish to be absent due to religious observance. This should not happen frequently and students should make a request in advance and be aware that staff can refuse requests to miss a compulsory session.

## **9. Examinations and Assessments**

When planning courses, staff must consider the main religious festivals and, wherever possible, avoid these dates for coursework deadlines and examinations. The University produces an on-line diversity calendar with information on the relevant dates.

Students should take note of coursework deadlines for all their assessments and if there is a coincidence with a religious festival they plan to participate in, should plan on handing in their assignment prior to the deadline date. If an examination coincides with a significant religious festival, students should discuss this with their department in advance. However the University does not accept religious observance as an automatic extenuating circumstance. Consideration will be on a case-by-case basis.

## **10. Dietary Requirements**

There are a variety of dietary rituals and laws across the many world religions. For example certain meats may be forbidden, or certain foods and utensils may need to be stored separately. Where students or staff are sharing food storage facilities and such issues arise, there should be consultation to find a mutually acceptable outcome for all concerned.

Most CCCU food outlets have vegetarian and vegan options and some stock kosher and halal foods. An ongoing dialogue between the Catering Department and the Inter Faith Council aims to ensure that, as far as possible, the dietary needs of students and staff who eat at the University are met.

Those responsible for organising functions involving catering should attempt to minimise potential conflicts between someone's religious beliefs and their ability to engage in University activities. Providing, at a minimum, a vegetarian food option and non-alcoholic drinks at social functions where food and drink is offered will usually accommodate most different faiths and beliefs.

Requests for reduced lunch breaks for staff who are fasting should be considered, bearing in mind the legal minimum of a twenty minute break for every six hours worked.

## **11. Work Placements**

When students are on work placement, 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. If students find a work placement to be incompatible with their religious beliefs, they can request an alternative and the relevant staff should seek to find one. However the University cannot always guarantee to find an alternative.

## **12. Provision for Religion and Belief at CCCU**

The University provides a Chapel (Canterbury), Quiet Rooms (all campuses), a Muslim Prayer Room (Canterbury) and a Buddhist Meditation Room (Canterbury). These rooms are supported and supervised by the University Chaplaincy Team. If further rooms are required for specific occasions, the University will accommodate this wherever possible and students and staff should make enquiries through the Chaplaincy. The University will keep under review the need for additional dedicated spaces.

The University's Inter Faith Council exists to promote understanding between different faith groups and those with no faith at the University. It is made up of staff and friends of the University who belong to different faith traditions and it is funded and facilitated by the Equality and Diversity Unit and the Chaplaincy. Council Members have their own personal relationships with their respective faiths, but their role within the Council is to represent not only their own experiences at the University, but the needs and opinions of staff and students who share their faith. Through the work of the Council, which includes the sponsorship of an annual inter-faith dialogue event, the University hopes to create an environment of mutual acceptance and respect for people of all religions and those of none.

## **13. Sources of Further Information**

### **Within the University:**

[Equality and Diversity Unit](#)

[Inter Faith Council](#)

[Chaplaincy](#)

### **External:**

[Equality Challenge Unit – Religion and Belief](#)

[Equality and Human Rights Commission Briefing Paper on Religion and Belief](#)