

## 2. RELIGION AND BELIEF IN STUDY

### Purpose and scope

- 2.1 This section of the Consolidated Academic Policies and Regulations (CAPR) explains how the College will fulfil its commitment to fair and respectful treatment of students, staff and visitors regardless of their religion or belief, in teaching and learning activities.
- 2.2 These regulations apply to all registered students of the College, and to any action taken on or after 1 June 2016 regardless of the date of the event giving rise to the action or request.

**NOTE: This policy must not be interpreted by any group or individual as approving a right to engage in activities or acts that negatively affect the rights of others.**

### Definitions

- 2.3 'Religion' means any religion, and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion.
- 2.4 'Belief' means any religious or philosophical belief, and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief.

### Introduction

#### *Overview*

- 2.5 The College enjoys the vitality and vibrancy that comes from the wide diversity of religions or beliefs on campus. This policy aims to address any areas on religion or belief not addressed specifically in the Code of Practice on Diversity, Dignity and Inclusion.
- 2.6 The College does not take or promote a particular religious stance or approach. As a learning community, the College ensures that all staff, students and visitors, regardless of their personal, religious or belief system, are treated with dignity, respect and fairness.
- 2.7 The policy is based on the principle that people have the right to practise their own religious or belief system but not to engage in actions that serve to challenge or infringe the freedom and rights of others.
- 2.8 The right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion or philosophical belief is absolute, but the right to manifest beliefs is qualified by the need to protect the rights and freedom of others.

#### *Principles*

- 2.9 The College will take steps to ensure it develops and promotes a positive culture of understanding and acceptance of the different ways that religion and belief manifest themselves in society.
- 2.10 Religious or philosophical belief must not be used to justify unnecessary, unfair or unlawful discrimination or behaviour against individuals, groups of staff or students, for example:
- (a) refusing to provide services to individuals or groups of people with protected characteristics;

- (b) making derogatory or discriminatory comments about individuals or groups of people;
- (c) showing reluctance or refusing to meet or work with staff, students, contractors or visitors to the College because they have a protected characteristic such as sex, sexual orientation, disability or different religion or belief.

*Offensive actions or behaviour*

- 2.11 The College will treat seriously behaviour it considers to be motivated by religious or belief intolerance or hate – including bullying, harassment, illegal discrimination or other criminal behaviour – by or to our staff, students, contractors or visitors. The College will notify the police if the Security Team judges this appropriate.
- 2.12 The College may take disciplinary action over any attempt to coerce or threaten others to comply with a particular religious or belief system, for example through unauthorised distribution of literature or through threats, bullying or harassment.
- 2.13 The College does not tolerate offensive literature or graffiti on its premises. Perpetrators are liable to disciplinary action.

Procedures

*Students and religious observances*

- 2.14 The College believes it is vitally important that students attend all teaching, learning, assessment, exam or work-experience activity. However, the College will consider any requests for students who wish to take time out of the academic year to participate in religious celebrations or pilgrimages and their personal circumstances.
- 2.15 Students who wish to be absent for longer than two (2) working days should inform their module leaders and apply for written consent. On getting approval, students should inform the attendance officer in Student Hub for accurate record-keeping.
- 2.16 Students who are absent may receive communications from the College via such methods as email, letter, SMS messaging or phone in line with the Attendance policy.

*Events and timetabling*

- 2.17 All College events and celebrations are designed to be inclusive and accessible. When arranging the timetable (including scheduling exams and coursework deadlines), the College will try to minimise conflict with the main religious festivals and key faith-related celebratory days.
- 2.18 Students should take note of coursework deadlines for all their assessments. If there is a coincidence with a major religious festival, they should plan to hand in their assignment before the deadline date.
- 2.19 The College does not accept religious observance as a valid extenuating circumstance. Students are encouraged to discuss exam and assessment conflicts with their programme leader well in advance of the holiday or event.
- 2.20 However, religious holy days are based on different calendars, including the lunar calendar, which is set by phases of the moon. They can fall within a range of days, the exact date not being fixed until very close to the time. If these dates fall within

term times, there may be a conflict between observing the holy day and meeting academic requirements.

*Curriculum, teaching and learning*

- 2.21 The College expects staff responsible for all aspects of the curriculum to identify and manage any adverse or positive effects that the curriculum and its content or manner of delivery or assessment may have on individuals or groups with protected characteristics including religion and belief.
- 2.22 Staff, students and visitors should be made aware of the right to freedom of speech and academic freedom as enshrined in the College's policy and the Consolidated Regulations.

*Pastoral care*

- 2.23 The Learning Support and Wellbeing Team at the College offer confidential, non-judgemental care and support to all staff, students and visitors regardless of religion and belief.
- 2.24 The College recognises that students may wish to consult a religious or non-religious pastor or leader for confidential discussion, prayer, services or events. Our Wellbeing Team can help with locating a suitable person or students can check the relevant web pages.

*Religion- or belief-based societies*

- 2.25 Societies affiliated to the Students' Union (GSMSU) or to the College are free to invite guest speakers from religious communities outside the College within the framework set out in the Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech.
- 2.26 The College reserves the right to cancel any event it considers will breach its equality policies, freedom-of-speech or security policies.

*Dress code*

- 2.27 The College imposes no specific dress code on its employees or students. The wearing of lawful items arising from cultural/religious norms (for example, sari, turban, hat, skullcap, hijab, kippah, mangal sutra, crucifix, cross and clerical collar) while on campus are a welcome part of diversity at the College.
- 2.28 The only limitations to the above are that:
- (a) security or examination requirements may mean that on occasion the temporary removal of veils and other clothes that cover the head and face is necessary to authenticate identity;
  - (b) health-and-safety requirements may mean that for certain tasks specific items of clothing such as overalls, protective clothing, uniforms and so on need to be worn; or
  - (c) students may have to wear a uniform for specific tasks or because a work-placement provider requires it.
- 2.29 In such circumstances, wherever possible, these requirements must be adapted to enable the person to wear their religious dress so long as they do not endanger their own health and safety or that of others, or risk the College's academic standards.

### Dietary requirements

- 2.30 The College will continually assess the demand for food that meets religious or belief requirements, and ask those contracted to provide food on campus to do the same.
- 2.31 Faculties, Directorates and Departments holding activities where refreshments are offered should take account of meeting the religion- or belief-based dietary requirements of those invited to attend. This includes providing non-alcoholic drinks and vegetarian, vegan, halal or kosher food, if notified of the need.

### Advice and support

1. Faith guides on good practice in universities in support of the principal religions are available from the Higher Education Academy: <http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>
2. Relevant guidance and reports on religion or belief in Higher Education can be obtained from the Equality Challenge Unit. <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/>
3. Advice about the interpretation of this policy and guidance may be obtained from the Academic Registrar. Religious information may be obtained from the Head of Advisory and Engagement.

### Fees

- 2.32 No additional fees or charges are associated with this policy.

### Legal and regulatory context

4. This policy has been developed and refers specifically to the definitions and requirements of the *Equality Act 2010*. The *Equality Act 2010* makes it unlawful to discriminate against individuals because of their religion, religious belief or similar recognised philosophical belief or because they have no religion or belief.
  5. The *Equality Act 2010* requires that public bodies – which while does not currently include the College have taken into account – to have due regard to the need to:
    - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
    - (b) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it;
    - (c) foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- 2.33 The College may not be bound by the principles and this policy alone may not provide the procedure to meet all of these principles, some of which may be met by other College policies and procedures.. It uses the principles as guidance only, to help it deal soundly with these matters.

### Enforcement, monitoring and review

- 2.34 If anyone believes that they, or another member of staff, student or visitor are being discriminated against or subject to harassment or victimisation they should, if possible, ask the perpetrator(s) to stop. If the behaviour continues, they should report the matter to a senior member of staff who will investigate.

- 2.35 A student who feels they are being discriminated against on the ground of religion or belief by other students, staff or visitors should raise a complaint under the Student Concerns and Complaints policy.
- 2.36 If any person or body in the College refuses to comply with a request or decision made to enforce this policy, their refusal must be reported to the Academic Registrar, who will take such action to enforce this policy as they think necessary.
- 2.37 Each year, the College must receive a report that enables it to monitor, identify and act on any shortfalls in how this policy is interpreted and applied.
- 2.38 Every three (3) years, the College must review this policy to ensure that:
- (a) they remain up to date and continue to meet the expectations of the UK Quality Code, applicable legislation or guidance;
  - (b) areas of improvement, or any concerns, raised by students, external examiners, or professional bodies have been addressed; and
  - (c) opportunities to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy have been taken.

**Schedule (not part of the policies and regulations):**

*Responsible Officer: Head of Student Support and Engagement*

*Approved by: Board of Directors and Academic Board*

*Version: 1.0*

*Date: 24 February 2016*

*Monitoring and Review Body: Faculty Board*

*Effective From: 1 June 2016*

*Next Scheduled Review: June 2019*