

**Religion or Belief  
Policy Statements and  
Guidance for Staff and  
Students**

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# 1. Introduction, definitions and scope

- 1.1 Through its equality and diversity charter, **DMUfreedom**, De Montfort University sets out its commitment to allow our students, staff and partners to have the freedom to be, freedom to inspire and freedom to succeed.
- 1.2 This policy aims to ensure that all staff, students and visitors, irrespective of their personal, religious or belief system are treated with dignity, respect and fairness.
- 1.3 The policy also aims to ensure that all staff and students are not placed at a disadvantage while studying, working, or visiting the university because of their religion or belief.
- 1.4 De Montfort University is a secular organisation and does not promote a particular religious stance. The core objectives of the university will be of the utmost importance in the consideration and accommodation of religious and faith practices and values.
- 1.5 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. The university will not tolerate bullying, harassment, or any form of intimidation or discrimination of those working, studying or engaging with the university based on religion or belief and including no religion or belief.
- 1.6 Through this policy, the university will take steps to ensure that it develops and promotes a positive culture of understanding and acceptance of the different manifestations of religion or belief within society. All university events and celebrations are designed to be inclusive and accessible.
- 1.7 This policy should be read alongside De Montfort University's policies and statements for staff and students set out on DMU's website, which together ensure we comply with the law and protect the rights of our staff, students, visitors and uphold the values set out in **DMUfreedom**.

# 2. The legal framework

- 2.1 Religion or belief is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. Under the legislation:
  - Religion means any religion and a reference to religion includes a reference to a lack of religion.
  - Belief means any religious or philosophical belief and a reference to belief includes a reference to a lack of belief.
- 2.2 The Equality Act 2010 sets out what behaviour is unlawful against individuals because of their religion, religious belief or similar recognised philosophical belief or because they have no religion or belief.
- 2.3 To ensure compliance with the legislation and in pursuit of achieving the aspirations set out in DMUfreedom, the university wants to ensure that all of its staff, students and visitors:

- are protected from unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act.
- are offered equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- experience good relations between people who share relevant protected characteristics and those who do not share them.

### 3. Interpretation

3.1 All staff and students are entitled to be treated with dignity and respect, and religious or philosophical beliefs do not override this entitlement. As a secular institution the following types of behaviour are not acceptable, for example:

- Refusal to provide services to individuals or groups of people with particular protected characteristics.
- Making derogatory or discriminatory comments about individuals or groups of people.
- Showing reluctance or refusing to meet with or work with staff, students, contractors or visitors to the university because of their particular protected characteristics (such as sex, sexual orientation or different religion or belief).
- Spreading or inciting others to spread extremist views/ideology (including violent extremism), extremist propaganda or materials and/or forcing these views/opinions on others.

3.2 Instances of this nature may result in disciplinary action under the respective disciplinary codes for students or for staff.

### 4. Offensive actions or behaviour

4.1 Behaviour that is considered to be motivated by religion or belief intolerance or hate including bullying, harassment, unlawful discrimination or other criminal behaviour, by or to our staff, students, contractors or visitors will be treated seriously.

4.2 De Montfort University does not tolerate communications or materials through any media form including social media that undermines the principles of DMU freedom and the scope of this policy. In particular, any attempt to coerce, or threaten others to comply with a particular religious or belief system, for example, through unauthorised distribution of propaganda or through threats, bullying or harassment, may result in disciplinary action.

4.3 Any member of staff who feels that they or another member of staff, student or visitor is being discriminated against or subject to harassment or victimisation should, where appropriate, try to resolve the matter informally in accordance with the **Dignity At Work Policy**. Formal complaints should be raised in accordance with the university's **Grievance Procedure**.

- 4.4 Students who feel that they, or others, are being discriminated against on the grounds of religion or belief either by other students, staff or visitors to the university should refer to the **Policy on Dignity and Respect (Students)**. Formal complaints should be raised in accordance with the **Student Complaint Procedure**. Where concerns arise which give concern that a student may be vulnerable to radicalisation as a result of their behaviour or statements which they make, which for example suggest a particular support for, or an untypical level of interest in far right wing ideas, or religious ideology the **Student at Risk Committee Policy** should be followed.

## 5. Data collection and monitoring

- 5.1 In order for the university to better understand the profile of its staff and students, and to better meet their needs equitably, the university seeks to collect data on the religion and beliefs held by our staff and students. Disclosure will be voluntary and there will be an option of 'prefer not to say'. Information is included in the annual staff and student diversity reports.

## 6. Recruitment and selection of our staff, students and contractors

- 6.1 The selection of staff and students must be based on merit, ability and potential. (Further information on the recruitment of staff at De Montfort University can be found in the university's **Recruitment and Selection Policy**).
- 6.2 The selection of businesses and individuals to contract within the university must follow proper university procurement procedures where applicable.
- 6.3 The fact or assumption that a person holds, or does not hold a particular religion or belief, or is associated with another person or group who hold or do not hold a religion or belief must not impact positively or negatively on the decision to select an individual as a student, employee or contractor to the university. The exceptions to this would be for cases of documented 'Occupational Requirement' (see the university's **Recruitment and Selection Policy** guidance "**Attracting suitable applicants**").

## 7. Staff religious observance leave (as detailed in the Special Leave Policy)

- 7.1 De Montfort University is supportive of employees who wish to take time off work for the purpose of religious observance. Full details can be found in the **Special Leave Policy**.

## 8. Students and religious observances

- 8.1 The university believes that it is vitally important that students are, wherever possible, not absent for any teaching, learning, assessment, exam or work experience activity. All activities have been designed to ensure that students have opportunities to be successful on their chosen programmes.
- 8.2 The university expects students to meet the requirements of their course, including attending teaching as required. Any planned absence must be discussed in advance with the relevant tutor, supervisor or programme leader. Ability to meet learning outcomes, examination dates and assessment deadlines will remain imperative. See also 10 below.

8.3 Any student absence will be managed in line with the regulations set out by the [Academic Support Office](#).

## 9. Curriculum, teaching and learning

9.1 Through the active processes of equality checklists and equality impact assessment at validation, revalidation and periodic review, the university expects staff responsible for all aspects of the curriculum to identify and manage any adverse or positive impacts that the curriculum and its content and/or manner of delivery or assessment may have on individuals or groups.

9.2 Staff, students and visitors should be made aware of the right to freedom of expression and academic freedom as enshrined in the university's policy: **Freedom of expression and academic freedom**.

## 10. Timetabling, examinations and assessments

10.1 Religious holy days are based on different calendars, including the lunar calendar. They can fall within a range of days, the exact date not being determined until very close to the time. Where these dates fall within term times, there may be a conflict between observing the holy day and meeting academic requirements.

10.2 Through the active processes of equality impact assessment, the university's scheduling arrangements will consider the needs of different groups of students including those with a religion or belief.

10.3 Students should take note of coursework deadlines for all their assessments and if there is a coincidence with a major religious festival, should plan on handing in their assignment prior to the deadline date. Ability to meet learning outcomes, examination dates and assessment deadlines will remain imperative. The university will not accept religious observance as a valid extenuating circumstance.

10.4 Further information on exam arrangements can be found on the [Examination Office webpages](#).

## 11. University chaplains

11.1 The Chaplaincy and Prayer Room offer support to all staff, students and visitors irrespective of religion or belief.

11.2 Times of prayers, services and other events can be found on the web pages or by contacting the relevant chaplain, these are: the [co-ordinating chaplaincy](#) or the [Muslim Chaplain](#).

## 12. External speakers and events

12.1 Those societies working within the policy and guidelines of the university and affiliated to the Students' Union (DSU) or to De Montfort University are free to invite guest speakers from religious communities outside the university within the framework set out in the university's policy on **Freedom of expression and academic freedom**, the **External**

**Speakers Policy**, or the De Montfort Students' Union External Speakers Policy.

12.2 The university reserves the right to cancel any event that is considered to breach its equality policies, freedom of expression, external speaker or security policies.

## **13. Dress code**

13.1 De Montfort University imposes no specific dress code on its employees or students (except where a job or placement requires a uniform or protective clothing to be worn). The wearing of lawful items arising from cultural/religious norms (including, for example, sari, turbans, hats, skullcaps, hijab, kippah, mangal sutra, crucifix, crosses and clerical collars) whilst on campus is seen as a positive illustration of our commitment to diversity.

13.2 The only limitations to the above are that:

- Security or examination requirements may mean that on occasion the temporary removal of veils and clothing that cover the head and face is necessary to authenticate identity. Arrangements will be made in these cases for authentication procedures to be conducted by staff of the same gender as the individual concerned where possible, reasonable and proportional to do so.
- 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. In such circumstances, these may be adapted wherever possible 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.
- Students on placement in uniformed work areas. The university expects students to follow the agreed guidelines on uniforms set by the work placement areas. In such instances or in similar ones – e.g. when staff or students are located for work or study in laboratory spaces or workshops – these particular guidelines or dress codes (and those imposed by external placement agencies) will apply and must be complied with.
- Where a uniform is required to undertake specific tasks, staff should be provided with suitable and appropriate clothing. Similarly, if a uniform does not preclude wearing headwear, then the wearing of turbans or headscarves should not be prohibited unless there is an overriding health and safety need.

## **14. Dietary requirements**

14.1 De Montfort University undertakes to assess the demand for food that meets religious or belief requirements. Collecting data on the stated religion or belief of staff and students assists this.

14.2 Faculties, directorates and departments holding activities where refreshments are offered should take into account meeting the religious or belief dietary requirements of those invited to attend. This includes considering providing non-alcoholic drinks and vegetarian, vegan, halal or kosher food where notified.

## **15. Review of policy**

- 15.1 Data on the diversity of religion or belief of De Montfort University staff and students will be collected, monitored and reported annually. Complaints, disciplinary and security incidents involving staff, students, visitors and contractors will be monitored.

## **16. Further information**

- 16.1 Faith Guides on good practice in universities in support of the principal religions are available from the HE Academy, York:

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>

- 16.2 Relevant guidance and reports on religion or belief in HE can be obtained from the Equality Challenge Unit.

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/>

- 16.3 Advice about the interpretation of this policy and guidance may be obtained from the Head of Equality and Diversity. Religious information may be obtained from the University Chaplains.