

# RESPECT & WELLBEING WITH PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY

## RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY POLICY FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

### 1.0 Policy statement

The University is committed to preventing discrimination and harassment on the grounds of religion or culture and all individuals and groups within the University have a responsibility to respect people's freedom to express their convictions and religious beliefs in their own terms, provided this does not impact on the rights and freedoms of others.

### 2.0 Aims and Objectives

All members of the University, both staff and students, are responsible for upholding the aims of the Religious Diversity Policy, for fulfilling their part in its implementation and for availing themselves of training and information in this regard.

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief or non-belief. This document sets out the University's policy in this area. Please also refer to the University's Equality and Diversity Policy and the Harassment and Bullying Policy.

Plymouth University welcomes religious and cultural diversity in its community, and acknowledges that the right to freedom of belief, conscience and religion is absolute but the right to manifest beliefs must be moderated by the need to protect the rights and freedoms of others.

To this end the University seeks to ensure that:

- Everyone is treated with dignity and fairness.
- Recruitment, selection and promotion of staff and students are based on criteria, which exclude religious or cultural belief or non-belief.<sup>1</sup>
- Where reasonably practicable, appropriate services and facilities are provided to meet the religious and cultural needs of staff and students.

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<sup>1</sup> Except where there is a genuine occupational requirement for an employee to be of a particular religion or belief in order to fulfil the job role.

- Reasonable accommodations are made for students and staff whose recognised religious holy days coincide with their work and study schedules.

Plymouth University itself does not promote any particular form of religion but recognises that some general holidays are based around the Christian calendar.

This commitment will be reflected in the University's working and learning environment, processes and procedures.

Should any member of the University feel that there may be a conflict between university life and their religious or cultural beliefs, they should raise the issue formally and the University will give a considered response.

### **3.0 Responsibilities**

The Board of Governors, with the assistance of the Vice-Chancellor and other Senior Managers, is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the University meets its commitments under the Religious Diversity Policy and that these are implemented and specifically integrated into policies, procedures, plans, audits and impact assessments covering all aspects of its operation.

All staff with management responsibilities are expected to familiarise themselves with this policy. Individual members of staff are responsible for informing the institution of their particular requirements.

### **4.0 Dress Code**

The University imposes no dress code on its staff and students, other than where this relates to health and safety or professional standards and requirements necessary to perform their duties and studies effectively and welcomes the variety of appearance resulting from individual styles and choices. The wearing of items arising from particular religious/cultural norms is seen as part of this welcome diversity. The University's policy for Religious Observance in Teaching Learning and Assessment and its associated guidance provides further practical guidance for students.

Where individuals are representing the University at other locations, we request that they are mindful of the expectations other organisations could reasonably expect in relation to their own dress policy.

### **5.0 Religious Observance**

The University will make reasonable accommodations for students and staff whose religious holy days coincide with their work and study schedules. Staff and students should inform their line manager or tutor if they have particular requirements and these will be considered.

### **6.0 Dietary Requirements**

The University will assess the demand for food that meets religious dietary requirements in consultation with the relevant religious groups. It will provide such food in its catering outlets according to the demand for it and the practicality of providing it.

## 7.0 Offensive Actions or Behaviour

This policy is based on the principle that everyone has a right to their own belief system. However, they have no right to try to persuade others of that belief against their will or inclination. Distribution of unwanted propaganda is not permitted, and making threats or offensive remarks about someone's beliefs will result in disciplinary action.

## 8.0 Monitoring

The University will monitor this policy as part of its normal processes, and will endeavour to monitor the religious composition of both its student and staff body by means of a voluntary question on religion or belief or non-belief as part of the student enrolment and registration procedures and in the staff validation forms.

## 9.0 Review

The University is committed to improving the way we lead and develop people, including ensuring all procedures are fit for purpose at individual, team and organisational level.

This policy will be reviewed as necessary, taking into account user feedback, evaluation mechanisms and any changes in statutory regulations that may be relevant. Any feedback or comments that could improve the policy should be fed back to the document owner.

## 10.0 Definition of terminology used in this document

- **The University:** The physical infrastructure and premises owned and/or managed by, or directly on behalf of the Higher Education Corporation [and its subsidiaries] that is known as Plymouth University, an exempt charity under the terms of the Charities Act 2011.
- **Religion or belief:** The Equality Act 2010 defines religion and belief as “any religious belief, provided the religion has a clear structure or belief system. Denominations or sects within a religion can be considered a protected religion or religious belief; and/ or “a philosophical belief”.

It should be noted that a 2009 Employment Appeal Tribunal decision defined the criteria for determining what a philosophical belief is. 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, compatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others.

Humanism, pacifism and atheism could be examples of philosophical beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Definition taken from the ACAS guide for employers and employees on religion or belief and the workplace last updated on the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) website May 20, 2014