

## Faith, Philosophical Belief and Religion

### Statement for Students

#### Introduction

1. Birkbeck offers an inclusive environment for students of all faiths and philosophical belief. Religion or belief is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. Under the legislation, religion and belief are defined as follows:
  - a. **religion:** any religion or reference to religion, including a reference to a lack of religion
  - b. **belief:** any religious or philosophical belief or reference to belief, including a reference to a lack of belief
2. Religion or belief should be taken to mean the full diversity of religious and belief affiliations, including non-religious and philosophical beliefs such as no faith, atheism, agnosticism and humanism.
3. Birkbeck recognises the importance of faith and philosophical belief in the world today and that for many students, faith and a philosophical belief underpins their journey in life. Birkbeck offer this statement to help students consider the concepts of faith and philosophical belief in relation to education and research.
4. It may be helpful for students to talk to advisors or leaders in current place of worship, contemplation or devotion before starting studies at Birkbeck. This can be helpful as such advisors or chaplains often have significant experience of supporting students and may be able to guide students as they balance work, study, caring and times of personal devotion or contemplation.
5. The College is committed to promoting equality and diversity in all aspects of its activities. Please see the link to [Birkbeck's equality statement](#).
6. Birkbeck admits students according to its Admissions Policy and upholds Freedom of Speech and expression and the College Principles of Dignity at Work and Study.
7. It may not always be possible to support individual students in accommodating all needs in relation to protected characteristics e.g. religion and belief; the needs of the institution and other members of the College community must be balanced with the rights and responsibilities of the individual

#### How can Birkbeck support me?

8. Given the richness and diversity of faith and philosophical viewpoints in the Birkbeck student community, the following signposts are offered to help guide students in their personal faith or philosophical belief journey or exploration.
  - a. **Chaplaincy** – The [University of London Chaplaincy](#) offers confidential individual pastoral care and encourages good relations between people of different faiths. The Chaplains who come from a number of major faith and denominational backgrounds will also help with reflection on issues of significance relating to study, work and research. You can also find information on local places of worship.

- b. **Multi-Faith Room** – Birkbeck's [multi-faith room](#) is available to Birkbeck students and staff of all faiths, and of no faith, for prayer and quiet contemplation. The room is shared and users will respect others who wish to use it and respect one another's beliefs and practices. It is expected that all users will ensure that it is left in a tidy state after use.
- c. **Birkbeck Student Union societies** – In common with most universities the Birkbeck [Students](#) Union has a number of clubs and societies that explore issues of faith and philosophical belief. Joining a club or society is also a great way of making friends and getting involved in the wider Birkbeck student community.

### Teaching, Learning & Research

9. Birkbeck's approach to learning, teaching and research is one that seeks to maximise the participation and engagement of all students in the learning environment. We are aware that the timing, location and format of the teaching and learning experience has the potential to impact on a student's ability to manifest their religious observance or beliefs.
10. Religious festivals or holy days are often based on calendars other than the Gregorian calendar used in the United Kingdom, including the lunar calendar. Specific dates for the upcoming years can be found on [www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/religious-festivals](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/resources/religious-festivals). Details of Birkbeck term dates can be found here: [www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/term-dates](http://www.bbk.ac.uk/about-us/term-dates)
11. Birkbeck endeavours to schedule the majority of classes at a time and date that minimises the impact on students with a faith or philosophical belief. In practice this means core teaching is usually held during Monday to Thursday where possible. However many of our students also find weekend events fit well around their working lives. Classes or events scheduled from Friday to Sunday will be recorded where this is possible and appropriate. As Birkbeck teaching is scheduled during the evening, before you enrol you should consider whether studying at Birkbeck is appropriate and consistent with your work and family life as well as religious observance requirements. See the [Birkbeck Attendance Framework](#) for information on expected attendance.
12. The College normally holds College-wide orientation events on the Saturday immediately prior to the start of term. Departmental induction events are normally held during the week. We encourage all new students to attend orientation events, but we recognise that this is not always possible, for a variety of reasons. In recent years, the College has ensured that we have recorded the Saturday orientation sessions for later viewing, and organised an orientation event later in the term that students unable to attend the pre-term event may be able to attend instead.
13. If you know you will be unable to regularly attend a class for observance reasons during the duration of your studies, you should seek guidance on reasonable adjustments from the University of London Chaplaincy. You should also liaise with your Department on how adjustments to accommodate your observance could be reasonably accommodated. Wherever possible these requests will be received sympathetically by staff and a written response given to any request made.

14. A large proportion of Birkbeck lectures are recorded and learning materials are made available on Moodle. This and also the sharing of lectures notes in advance or directed self-study or readings are common ways in which we support observant students at Birkbeck who find it difficult to attend specific classes. Support can be considered for rest days, times of regular devotion or worship as well as for significant periods of observance or religious celebrations such as Lent, Ramadan, Passover, Diwali or the Solstice.

### **Field trips**

15. Religious observance may affect participation or engagement with activities such as field trips or placements. Where individuals may have particular requirements concerning, for example, travel, accommodation or different meal times and catering availability these should be discussed in advance with field trip organisers so specific needs or alternate arrangements can be considered.

### **Examination & Assessment**

16. The College's Examinations & Assessments Office in Registry Services is also mindful of key religious observance events when drawing up the examination timetable. This has to be balanced with ensuring that the examination and assessment timetable operates efficiently and effectively to deliver the programme requirements within the available time and space for our overall student body.
17. Students can notify Registry Services via ASK where faith-based commitments may prevent them from taking an examination. The Registry Services will endeavour to avoid scheduling examinations on such dates but it cannot be guaranteed. Students should offer a minimum of 6 weeks' notice of their intention to observe religious festivals if they believe it will clash with a published examination date.
18. It may be possible for sheltered examination conditions to be arranged for observant students to accommodate faith and philosophical belief. These will be arranged with designated faith advisors.

### **Further Information & Reading**

- [College Principles of Dignity at Work and Study](#)
- [Student Complaints Policy & Procedure](#)
- [Freedom of Speech Policy & Procedure](#)
- [Student Services](#)

Academic Board

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