



**Royal  
Veterinary  
College**  
University of London

## **RELIGION AND BELIEF POLICY**

### **Introduction**

The Royal Veterinary College aims to create an inclusive environment for everyone, regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or any other characteristic.

The College welcomes staff, students, clients, visitors & others of all religions, faiths and beliefs. As a pluralist community, the College also respects the integrity and contributions to College life of agnostics, atheists and humanists.

The College aims to ensure that no one faces discrimination on the grounds of their religion or belief or lack of belief. This policy provides an overview of how we are working towards achieving this aim.

### **The Legal Context**

#### **Legal Definition of 'Religion and Belief'**

The term 'religion and belief' is defined as 'any religion, religious belief, or similar philosophical belief'. In order to meet this definition, a belief must have one or more of the following characteristics:

- collective worship
- a clear belief system or
- a profound belief affecting a way of life or worldview.

Atheism and agnosticism come within this definition but political beliefs have been explicitly excluded. Employment tribunals and other courts have to decide whether other circumstances are covered by the Regulations.

### **Legislation**

At the time of writing (June 2009), a new **Equality Bill 2009** is progressing through Parliament. The Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent in spring 2010 and to come into force from autumn 2010. This document will be amended as necessary once the new legislation is in place.

#### **Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003**

<http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031660.htm>

The regulations prohibit direct or indirect discrimination, victimisation or harassment on the grounds of religion or belief. This applies to employment and vocational training. These regulations were introduced by the UK Government to comply with the European Union's Equality Framework Directive 2000.

## **Equality Act 2006**

[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2006/ukpga\\_20060003\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060003_en_1)

The Act extended the above prohibition to the provision of goods, facilities and services and prohibits religious discrimination in the exercise of public functions.

## **Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006**

[http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga\\_20060001\\_en\\_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060001_en_1)

This Act expanded on the existing criminal offences of incitement to racial hatred contained in the Public Order Act 1986 so that people are protected against harm because of their religious beliefs or lack of belief.

While in some cases, race and religion are closely connected, most faith groups are very diverse and include a variety of beliefs, denominations, practices and traditions. They may include people of various ages, cultures, ethnic origins and social backgrounds. It is therefore important that there is no stereotyping of people who belong to a particular faith or belief.

## **Genuine Occupational Requirement**

A 'Genuine Occupational Requirement' can be obtained where it can be proved that to be of a particular religion or belief is necessary for carrying out a particular role effectively. Apart from the role of College Chaplain, it is unlikely that any posts at the College would fall into this category.

## **Religion & Belief and Sexual Orientation**

Situations may arise where the rights of one individual conflict with the rights of another; the most frequent example of this is when an individual objects to lesbian, gay and bisexuality on the grounds of religion or belief. Such individuals are legally entitled to hold such beliefs under the Religion and Belief Regulations but must not manifest their views in a way that offends, intimidates or humiliates others or is hostile or degrading to them.

Practical aspects of the Religion and Belief policy are outlined in the next section, listed in alphabetical order.

## **Booking Rooms for Faith Related Events**

All room bookings should be requested through the Estates Department, via the College's Book a Room facility on the intranet.

The following information should be submitted when making the request (which should also be copied via email to the Chaplain – contact details can be found on the Colleges intranet):

- the name(s) of the organiser(s)
- the name(s) of any speaker(s)
- an outline of the activities to be undertaken during the event.

If the Chaplain has any concerns, these will be discussed in the first instance with the proposed organiser and/or other senior College staff.

Events should be in accordance with the 'Statement on Building Good Relations between People of Different Faiths and Beliefs', produced by the Inter Faith Network for the UK:

[http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/Building\\_Good\\_Relations.pdf](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/Building_Good_Relations.pdf)

Organisers should aim to enhance the understanding of a particular faith at the same time as showing respect for the diverse College community. College premises must not be used for the purposes of trying to convert others to another faith or belief.

## **Calendar Dates: Timetabling and Work Patterns**

Dates are important within the religious context because they relate to religious celebrations, festivals and ceremonies. This may also apply to times of the days or days of the week. Care should therefore be taken when fixing in advance the dates of e.g.:

- open days – for potential applicants
- assessments and examinations
- training events
- other College events for staff, students, visitors and/or others

However, even with advanced planning, it may not always be possible to select dates that do not clash with a religious celebration. This may be the case with examinations. Students should indicate as soon as possible if there is a problem with a particular date so that an alternative date can be considered. If this is not possible, students will be offered a deferral to the next available opportunity. Every attempt will also be made to ensure that interview dates do not place candidates at a disadvantage, with alternative arrangements being made whenever possible.

The period of Ramadan is recognised for the purposes of fasting. Any staff or students who are affected by this have the option to inform their managers or tutors to ensure that they can take the necessary breaks.

The Equality Challenge Unit has recently produced (May 2009) guidance on 'Religious observance in higher education: institutional timetabling and work patterns':

### **College Chaplaincy: Role**

The College Chaplain is part of the main Chaplaincy team of the University of London and is appointed to the College by the Senior Chaplain. The Chaplain is an important part of the College community to which he/she makes an invaluable contribution.

The Chaplain's time is divided between the College (2 days per week) and the UCL Medical School.

Within the scope of the Religion and Belief policy, the Chaplain will act as the first point of advice and will recommend updates and amendments. The Chaplain liaises with ministers of other faiths locally and therefore can involve them as necessary in the development and implementation of this policy.

Contact details for the College Chaplain can be found on the College Intranet.

### **Dietary Requirements**

The College recognises that some religions or beliefs have specific dietary requirements, relating to types of food, food preparation and storage. The College's Catering department aims to meet the most common religious dietary requirements upon request (e.g. Halal, Kosher, vegetarian) and will endeavour to assist with such requests in a sensitive and reasonable manner. Dietary needs should also be considered when catering is organised for meetings, events and conferences.

### **Dress Codes**

As a public authority and Higher Education Institution, the College requires its employees to dress in a manner that provides a positive image of the College. Although the College welcomes the variety of appearance brought by individual styles and choices, there are several basic rules that apply to staff and students.

Dress should conform to the current majority view in our society of what constitutes decency. The wearing of clothing displaying slogans that are discriminatory – e.g. racist or sexist slogan – is unacceptable and will not be permitted.

The wearing of items from particular religious group norms is of course welcome. However, Health and Safety requirements may mean that for certain tasks, specific items of clothing (overalls, protective clothing etc) must be worn. If such clothing constitutes a conflict with an individual's religious belief, the issue will be considered sympathetically to find a satisfactory compromise. This will also apply if certain items of clothing/headwear/jewellery might constitute a health and safety risk in areas such as clinical work.

### **Fulfilment of Duties**

As a Higher Education Institution with research facilities, the College engages in many activities and research projects, which in some circumstances an individual may object to on moral grounds usually related to

religion or belief. If this situation arises and an individual's duties require them to undertake activities to which they object, the matter should be raised with their manager or tutor and resolved as necessary.

### **Leave for Religious Festivals, Extended Leave and Time for Religious Observance**

All staff are required to work in accordance with their contract, regardless of their belief or non-belief. Students are also required to follow the requirements of their course of study and attend the necessary lectures, tutorials, etc.

Staff are entitled to take annual paid leave to participate in their religious celebrations, festivals or ceremonies. Requests for such leave should be made a reasonable time in advance so that line managers can consider all requests in the light of workloads and the effect that any absence will have on the service. Time off can normally be accommodated using annual leave, time off in lieu or exceptionally, unpaid leave.

Requests for extended leave on religious grounds will also be considered sympathetically. This may be necessary in order to go on a pilgrimage or to attend ceremonies related to births, weddings or deaths of relatives abroad. If the leave extends beyond the annual holiday entitlement, the excess days will be treated as unpaid leave.

Students wishing to be absent for similar reasons should discuss the implications with their tutor so that a reasonable arrangement can be made. Missed learning opportunities resulting from participation in religious festivals must be made up by the student, with any reasonable support from tutors as necessary.

Staff and students may also wish to take time during the working day for religious observance. This may involve time for private prayer or to attend religious services such as a Mass or Communion Service. This should normally pose no problems on weekdays although it might be problematic if staff have to work on Sundays. A reasonable arrangement can usually be made if the issue is discussed with the line manager.

The College recognises that alone amongst faith groups, the Islamic faith requires prayers at specific times and in certain conditions. Managers and tutors should be sensitive to these issues and deal reasonably with any requests by staff or students. Some of these prayers take the same time as a short coffee break and one of the breaks tends to fall within the lunch break so it should normally be possible to accommodate such needs.

### **Quiet Room Facilities**

The College has quiet rooms at both campuses. These are non-segregated spaces available for individual quiet prayer, reflection or meditation by men or women. They are unsuitable for group prayer, although requests to book other rooms for group prayer will be considered in a sensitive and reasonable manner. Staff and students using the rooms should be sensitive to the needs of other users.

### **Religious Societies**

Religious societies affiliated to the Students' Union are free to operate within the general policy and guidelines of the College. They may operate as necessary within the best interests of their members but without detriment to the needs of other staff and students. Societies are free to invite speakers from religious communities outside the College, although the programmes for all such events must be passed to the College Chaplain in advance for approval. Freedom of speech is an important principal at the College.

## **Titles**

Recognised or ordained ministers or leaders of religious communities may have particular titles or designation, e.g. Imam, Rabbi, Reverend. Staff or students who have such titles should indicate if they wish the title to be used in all correspondence with the College and on staff or student directories, the College website etc.

## **Working with Colleagues**

The College is a diverse institution where people work together to achieve the aims of the College. All prospective staff and students need to be aware that they will be expected to work with all colleagues and clients, regardless of their gender or gender identity.

Individuals whose religion restricts contact with the opposite sex should discuss their situation in confidence with their Academic Tutor, line manager and/or the Director of Human Resources. As the College is not a single sex institution, however, there may be limited possibilities for making alternative arrangements without infringing sex discrimination legislation.

This is the agreed Colleges policy on Religion and Belief, approved by the College Council, the Senior Management Group (SMG) and the Equality Strategy Working Group (ESWG) with trade union representatives. It may be subject to review and amendment from time to time in light of changes in legislation or perceived problems of operation.