



Religious  
Literacy  
Leadership

In Higher Education

# Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education

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**Leadership Challenges: Case Studies**

Adam Dinham and Stephen H Jones



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## Case Studies: Resources for Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education

In the following case studies we are seeking to complement our conceptual analysis with examples of real-life challenges and dilemmas posed by religious faith in university settings. These are derived from examples encountered in primary research in three Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and in conversations with vice-chancellors (VCs), students and staff. They have been altered to preserve anonymity.

These case studies have been developed to reflect both the policy concerns that VCs are asked to engage with in the areas the programme has identified and the practical arenas in which dilemmas arise. Each case study identifies to one degree or another the questions raised in relation to equalities and diversity, widening participation and social mobility, student experience and good campus relations.

However, the case studies are not organised solely around these domains but, rather, focus on the places and spaces in which students and staff might encounter religious faith. This recognises that in real life, these dilemmas and challenges will arise in messy, contingent ways rather than systematically, and many will cut across policy areas and the practical spaces for addressing them. In some cases, registry, chaplaincies, student support services, examinations and many others may all be implicated in one 'case' or dilemma.

The case studies presented here are, of course, indicative rather than representative or exhaustive. They give some sense of the sorts of dilemmas that arise and what they relate to, conceptually and in policy.

Each case study also highlights the major issues that arise, drawing on our analysis of the literature and policy more widely. We have then related these issues to resources for addressing them and hope that this will be useful in supporting universities' own engagement with the dilemmas they face. We have also proposed some possible responses, drawing on what others have done in similar situations. These responses occasionally mention different approaches to religion and belief in higher education (HE), referring to HEIs that see themselves as 'neutral', 'formative-collegial', or 'committed to social justice'. These different approaches are outlined in more detail in the accompanying publication, *An Analysis of Challenges of Religious Faith, and Resources for Meeting them, for University Leaders*. They are intended as a way of stimulating debate about the best way of reacting to increasing levels of religious diversity in university settings.

Overall, the aim is that the analysis that emerged from *An Analysis of Challenges of Religious Faith, and Resources for Meeting them, for University Leaders* can be recognised, debated and applied in these concrete examples. In this way they can be used as a tool for locating university leaders' practices and attitudes to religious faith in very explicit ways. We hope that VCs and other staff in HE will find the case studies helpful in at least two ways: first, for consolidating existing stances and reflecting explicitly on what roots them and how they can be sustained and built upon; and second, for identifying alternative approaches in ways that support highly religiously literate responses.

For more information and contact details visit [www.religiousliteracyhe.org](http://www.religiousliteracyhe.org)

## 1

## Exams and timetabling

# Lectures on a Saturday

A university's medical degree requires students to attend classes on a Saturday, some of which are based not on campus but at a local hospital. A number of the Jewish students taking the course do not feel able to attend these classes as they fall on the Sabbath. However, without taking part they will not be able to successfully complete the course as this on-site training is one of its required components. In addition, the day on which the classes take place cannot be altered because they have to fit in with the timetable of the hospital. This means that, as one of the university's equality and diversity (E&D) officers comments, some of the staff that run the course sometimes "*feel in their gut, knowing from experience, that a particular person is not going to be able to complete the course effectively*". Because it is not considered good practice to ask students about their religious affiliation during the application process it is proving extremely difficult to avoid these clashes.



### Issues to consider

- What does the law say on this issue and is it clear?
- Is the university under any obligation – legal or otherwise – to alter the time of the classes or to provide some alternative?
- Are there any other options available to staff at the university to try and minimise the difficulties created by having these classes on a Saturday?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

Legally, a university is required to avoid all forms of indirect discrimination, which means any practice which, although applied to all, disadvantages a specific religious group. Only if a practice constitutes a genuine business need can it be justified legally. In the above case, the students who are not able to work on Saturdays for religious reasons are disadvantaged, as they may not be able to complete their course. However, as there are limitations on staff and as another organisation is involved it is also the case that running the classes on Saturday is likely to constitute

a genuine business need. There is no alternative day on which the course could reasonably be run. The university is not therefore likely to have to alter its practices in order to comply with the law. However, it will need to communicate both its decision and the process by which that decision was reached clearly and transparently to all the parties involved, preferably in advance.

### Additional options

In this case, there are other things the university may wish to do. Best practice in interviews and application forms is to avoid asking students about their personal interests such as place or frequency of worship, communal involvement, or the religious ethos of any educational establishments attended. However, there is no rule against making clear what demands the course will make from the outset. *The Student Experience Report* by the National Union of Students (NUS) in 2008 indicated that 41 per cent of students would like to be given an outline of a course timetable prior to arriving at university. It may be helpful for a university to consider including such details in early contact with students as part of a religious literacy strategy, and spelling out its position in relation to this.

It is also worth noting that in this case the university is reacting to the concerns of the students as and when they arise. In future, when organising university timetables it may help to avoid similar problems if religious considerations can be taken into account at a much earlier stage, perhaps by using a calendar of significant religious festivals and times of observance. Such calendars are available from various sources (see below) and many E&D departments have their own calendars which can be easily disseminated. This may mean it is possible to negotiate strategic alterations with the hospital partner sufficiently in advance to take account of Friday–Sunday absences for some religious students.

While there may be no legal obligation for the university to change its practices or provide alternative classes for the students affected, the implications for the students are nevertheless very significant. If the university cannot change, observant students may be left with a stark choice between their religion and their course. Given this, the university may wish to put in place procedures for assisting students who are the worst affected with a view to minimising the consequences. This could involve providing alternative arrangements by planning in advance, assisting students who cannot complete the course to change to another area of study, or even helping them to transfer to another university smoothly.

### Religion in the university: key choices

This example raises significant questions about how universities engage in discussions with religious students and staff about their practices. A university that conceives of itself as secular or neutral may be reluctant to consult students about their specific religious beliefs and the needs associated with them, whereas a university that is more open to religious identities may not find this difficult. In this case, the Jewish chaplain at the university was keen to stress the significance of being able to talk the issue over. The important thing, in his view, is “*recognition of a level of understanding*”, which includes a willingness to discuss difficulties. It may be that, even if it is not possible to find a way around the problem, by entering into a conversation about the issue the students and the university are able to reach agreement, with the students affected perhaps being permitted to make up the work at a later date or in different ways. This could involve setting up formal mechanisms or naming specific staff as people to go to in order to discuss any specific problems.

## Available resources

Details of a university’s legal obligations in relation to religion and belief can be found in the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers and Employees* and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) guide *Employing People in Higher Education: Religion and Belief*:

[www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/j/guide\\_religionB\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/j/guide_religionB_1.pdf)

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view)

A guide to testing for reasonable accommodation is provided by St Ethelburga’s Centre for Reconciliation and Peace in their guide *Religious Diversity in the Workplace*:

[www.stethelburgas.org/sites/default/files/Religious Diversity in the Workplace V11.pdf](http://www.stethelburgas.org/sites/default/files/Religious Diversity in the Workplace V11.pdf)

(St Ethelburga’s can also be contacted directly about these resources at [enquiries@stethelburgas.org](mailto:enquiries@stethelburgas.org) or [info@thebusinessoffaith.org](mailto:info@thebusinessoffaith.org))

Specific advice about timetabling in HE is given in the ECU’s briefing paper *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Institutional Timetabling and Work Patterns*:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-timetabling](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-timetabling)

Information about Judaism that HEI leaders may need to be aware of can be found in the Higher Education Academy (HEA) publication *A Guide to Judaism*:

[www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith\\_guides.html](http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html)

Advice on flexible employment options is produced by the University of Staffordshire, and their recommendations can be read in their ‘next steps’ document:

[www.staffs.ac.uk/feo/](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/feo/)

[www.staffs.ac.uk/feo/documents/next\\_steps.pdf](http://www.staffs.ac.uk/feo/documents/next_steps.pdf)

Data on the additional information which students would like to receive prior to starting university can be found in the *Student Experience Report* produced by the NUS (p. 9):

[www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/4017/NUS\\_StudentExperienceReport.pdf](http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/4017/NUS_StudentExperienceReport.pdf)

The ACAS guide cited above contains some details about common religious practices, but the BBC’s website contains a much more detailed and regularly updated interfaith calendar, which includes additional details about regular times of religious observance for each tradition:

[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/)

[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/)

## 2

## Exams and timetabling

# Exams during Ramadan

In a few years' time Ramadan will fall in July (2013 and 2014) and then June (2015 and 2016), clashing first with the period in which students will be taking re-sits and then with the main exam period. The E&D officers in a number of universities have expressed concern about how best to manage the situation, knowing that it will be impossible to move or to re-run every exam, but also that fasting students may not be able to perform to the best of their ability. One university E&D officer reflects that *"it's a serious thing, you know, and we need to get ahead of the game with regards to what we need"*. Another officer at a different university, where a large number of the students are Muslim, concludes that it will *"seriously affect life in the university"*. There are a few years before the events clash, but at the same time it could cause serious problems if it is not planned for correctly, and there is uncertainty about the best approach.



### Issues to consider

- What are the options available to the universities to deal with this issue?
- Who might need to be involved in discussions about planning for when the events clash?
- What advice can and should the university give to its students?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

In this case, the university is unlikely to have any legal obligations even though some of the students might struggle as a result of the clash of events since the festival is unlikely to prevent attendance. A number of HEIs in the UK have a policy of not scheduling exams on holy days or religiously significant points during the week. However, both of these events cover a whole month and it would seriously disrupt the academic year to hold all the exams at a later date. There may be some exams which could be scheduled slightly differently, but university leaders may choose to proceed as normal.

### Additional options

Although making large alterations to the exam timetable may not be feasible, it may be possible for certain changes to be made to lessen the burden on students. For example, the university could try to schedule exams earlier in the day where there is the option to do so, when those fasting are least affected by hunger. It may also be possible for fasting students to take exams later in the evening, after having eaten. These kinds of measures require careful planning, however. Students sitting exams later in the day would need to be either chaperoned or would need to take alternative exam papers. Papers that contribute to degree classification need to be authorised externally, and so take a lot of time to

prepare. Such choices have therefore to be taken by individual universities depending upon their particular circumstances, including the number of Muslim students. In addition to this, the university may wish to avoid scheduling any exams or other events on Eid ul-Fitr, the festival that marks the end of the month of Ramadan.

If the university chooses to proceed without making any major alterations to its exam timetable it could still offer advice to any students who are fasting which would help them to avoid losing concentration or becoming dehydrated. The Department of Health and other organisations (see below) offer advice on what foods to eat and to avoid during Ramadan, including guidance from both healthcare professionals and from Islamic scholars. The university could take steps to disseminate such advice to students via religious societies and other channels. There could also be clear procedures for addressing the issue of missed exams. If a university does take these steps to prevent fasting students from suffering unnecessarily during the exam period, or responds by making timetable alterations, it should be careful to ensure that non-Muslim students do not react badly, feeling that Muslim students are being given special treatment. To prevent such conflict, university leaders should be open and transparent at all times, and may choose to take steps to communicate the significance of the fast to non-Muslim students.

### Religion in the university: key choices

Different universities will wish to approach Ramadan—and indeed other festivals and holy days—differently. To make the Ramadan period as positive an experience as possible for fasting students and more widely, some universities may choose to take extra steps, some perhaps holding public events. Advising staff and students to show awareness and sensitivity around mealtimes, for example, may be considered to be of benefit. There may also be opportunity for students to break the fast (*iftar*) together. Indeed, *iftar* could provide an opportunity for Muslim and non-Muslim students to come together and learn about Ramadan, as could Eid ul-Fitr at the end of the fast. Other universities may prefer to see religious practices as essentially a private matter, and leave students and staff to themselves on this issue.

## Available resources

The Department of Health has produced a free *Ramadan Health Guide* which gives details on the best foods to eat and how to avoid dehydration. The organisation Maslaha also offers advice about looking after one's health during Ramadan, both from Islamic scholars and from health professionals:

[www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_078408.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_078408.pdf)

[www.maslaha.org](http://www.maslaha.org)

[www.diabetesintowerhamlets.org/ramadan](http://www.diabetesintowerhamlets.org/ramadan)

St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace has produced a short guide entitled *Ramadan: Briefing Notes for Managers* which contains important information about the fast and the related festivals:

[www.stethelburgas.org/multifaith/resources](http://www.stethelburgas.org/multifaith/resources)

(St Ethelburga's can also be contacted directly about these resources at [enquiries@stethelburgas.org](mailto:enquiries@stethelburgas.org) or [info@thebusinessoffaith.org](mailto:info@thebusinessoffaith.org))

Specific advice about timetabling in HE is given in the ECU's briefing paper *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Institutional Timetabling and Work Patterns*:  
[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-timetabling](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-timetabling)

A short guide to Ramadan itself can be found on the BBC's website. The date of Ramadan each year is also included in the BBC's interfaith calendar:

[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/ramadan\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/islam/practices/ramadan_1.shtml)

[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/faith.shtml?muslim](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/faith.shtml?muslim)

Details of the Islamic faith that HEIs may need to be aware of can be found in the HEA's *A Guide to Islam*:  
[www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith\\_guides.html](http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html)

## 3

## Good campus relations

# Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism

Recently a university hosted a discussion on the subject of the January 2009 military offensive in Gaza at which speakers were invited to discuss the conflict and suggest actions students could take in response. One of the speakers was a concentration camp survivor who had previously drawn links between her time in the Warsaw Ghetto and the situation in the Gaza Strip. Some members of staff and the Jewish society objected to her invitation, with a few of them asking that she be refused permission to speak. At the event, which eventually went ahead as planned, a number of the speakers advocated a boycott of all products from Israel, including an academic boycott. Again, objections were raised by staff and students, with some claiming that propositions were, if not motivated by prejudice as such, in effect anti-Jewish as they threatened to exclude Israelis from university campuses. One member of staff said of the event:

*I tried to get involved because I thought this could be a really constructive way of showing solidarity [...]. So I went into that, and it turned into an anti-Zionist thing again, and I ended up getting chucked out just for trying to debate some of those principles.*

A campaign to develop links with a university in Palestine grew out of the event, and a Facebook group was established to raise awareness and help put pressure on the university to establish scholarships for Palestinian students. Allegations have been made about anti-Jewish remarks being made on the site. As the same member of staff at the university commented:

*The Facebook group became host to some rather nasty instances of anti-Semitism, straightforward anti-Semitism [...]. Articles were posted that talked about Jews unfavourably, Jews and media control and all these kinds of old stereotypes about Jews [...].*

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

The Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006) makes ‘stirring up hatred’ on grounds of religion or belief illegal, either via speeches or written materials. The university should note any cases where violence is called for against Jews, which would constitute a clear offence. In these instances it may be appropriate for the university to make contact with the police. In addition to this, the university has an obligation under the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations (2003) and the Equality Act (2006) to prevent harassment on grounds of religion and belief, which covers actions that may create an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment. Some universities therefore now require their students’ union to give the university two weeks’ notice of any visiting external speaker so they can respond to the concerns of students and staff. Others have a dedicated statement outlining what is and what is not acceptable in debates such as those mentioned above. University leaders may also wish to put



### Issues to consider

- What legal obligations does the university have under Acts such as the Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006)?
- Should the university do anything to assist in distinguishing between criticism of Israel, anti-Zionism and anti-Jewish sentiment, and if so what?
- What are the implications for freedom of speech?

in place central policy guidelines so that students can raise their concerns with a higher authority when they feel they are not being taken seriously elsewhere. Some universities make a point of addressing heads of student societies at the beginning of each year on the subject of freedom of speech.

The university’s role is less clear when perceived anti-Jewish sentiment is found in online forums, as the case of “straightforward anti-Semitism” was above. If the people using the forum are all students at the university, or if the forum is run by students, in response to complaints about anti-Semitism the university may wish to be in contact with the forum’s managers with a view to encouraging them to moderate what is said, or at the very least take a public stand declaring all derogatory comments about Jews to be unacceptable and unwelcome on the site. If such views are being expressed anonymously in non-official channels

university leaders may wish to respond by officially distancing themselves from the comments, and strongly encouraging the students' union to follow their example.

### Additional options

One of the most complicated aspects of conflicts such as this is that, partly because of a lack of religious literacy, terms and phrases are sometimes employed which are not regarded by the people who use them as derogatory or anti-Jewish, but which are felt to be offensive by Jews. For example, a cartoon in *The Independent* in 2003 showed the then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon devouring a baby, which caused offence among Jews because it echoed historical images of the 'blood libel'—the once-common belief that Jews ingest children's blood during religious rituals. Comparisons between the state of Israel and Nazi Germany are often regarded as unacceptable for similar reasons, firstly because such comments are hyperbolic, and secondly because they toy with what is a uniquely sensitive area. University leaders may wish to try to discourage—or even insist that—direct comparisons between Nazism and Israel are avoided in publicity for events such as those mentioned above. For similar reasons, a university may wish to mention the matter within its official policies on religious discrimination and harassment. These may be located in a general policy about safety of and respect for religious faith on the campus.

Tensions and incidents on campus have sometimes centred on students' union votes concerning Israel and Zionism. Students' unions have in the recent past proposed motions that anti-Zionism or criticism of Israel were not anti-Semitic, and that Israeli goods should be boycotted. Others have given official backing to campaigns such as that mentioned above to 'twin' universities. These have led in some cases to tense relationships between students' unions and Jewish societies. In the 1970s some Jewish societies were actually proscribed. To avoid such tensions, university leaders may attempt to bring the societies and the current sabbatical officers into contact to agree some ground rules for debates and discussions. Where this is not possible, perhaps because the students' union feels unable to facilitate the affiliation of the society with the union, the HEI may try to establish internal processes and procedures to help them to resolve their issues and move forward.

### Religion in the university: key choices

Some of the most challenging questions relate to possible restrictions to freedom of speech on campus. Some of the hardest choices universities have to make concern whether it is ever right to cancel a public discussion at a university. When this is based on students' fears of anti-Jewish sentiment, or the reputations of the speakers that have been invited, this is perhaps even more sensitive. Prohibition of events and external speakers should be a last resort, but such things have happened. In the past, racial supremacists and religious extremists have been denied a platform on university campuses. Events discussing links between Zionism and Judaism have also been cancelled by universities where the promotional literature appeared to link Jews with media control. Part of the reason this question is so complicated is that there is no agreement about what constitutes anti-Semitic or anti-Jewish discourse. Academics disagree over whether a boycott of Israeli goods or universities should be regarded as in effect anti-Jewish, for example. Academics and others have the right to choose not to associate with public instruments of a particular regime, and a

distinction has to be made between an academic boycott of institutions and adverse decisions against individuals that are made because of their race or nationality. Yet it has been claimed that boycotts harm Jewish, and particularly Israeli, individuals. Universities should therefore examine the wording of any boycott closely. It is also helpful to note that in the above example the sense of being treated unfairly came from the person being unable to debate what were considered significant issues—not from the potential terms of the debate itself. University leaders may wish to encourage the organisers of events such as these to make sure that a number of perspectives are heard, rather than cancelling any debates.

## Available resources

Details of the nature and prevalence of contemporary anti-Semitism is documented in the All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism's *Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism*. Many of the examples mentioned above are explored in more detail, particularly on pages 29-42:

[www.thepcaa.org/Report.pdf](http://www.thepcaa.org/Report.pdf)

A survey of incidents of anti-Semitism is produced regularly by the Community Security Trust in their *Antisemitic Incidents Report*:

[www.thecst.org.uk/docs/Incidents\\_Report\\_Jan\\_June\\_09.pdf](http://www.thecst.org.uk/docs/Incidents_Report_Jan_June_09.pdf)

Advice on promoting good campus relations can be found in the updated ECU/Universities UK (UUK) report, *Promoting Good Campus Relations: An Institutional Imperative*. Information can also be found in an older publication entitled *Promoting Good Campus Relations: Dealing with Hate Crimes and Intolerance*:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice/promoting-good-campus-relations-imperative](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice/promoting-good-campus-relations-imperative)

An in-depth debate about an academic boycott of Israel between Martin Shaw and David Hirsh can be found in *Democratiya* 13/14:

[http://dissentmagazine.org/democratiya/article\\_pdfs\\_d14ShawHirsh-1.pdf](http://dissentmagazine.org/democratiya/article_pdfs_d14ShawHirsh-1.pdf)

R J Nash *et al's* book *How to Talk About Hot Topics on Campus* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008) provides in depth advice on talking about difficult subjects. The Public Conversations Project in the US has produced a guide entitled *Constructive Conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Guide for Convening and Facilitating Dialogue in Jewish Communities in the US*:

[www.publicconversations.org/docs/resources/JDGmanbwcvrfinal.pdf](http://www.publicconversations.org/docs/resources/JDGmanbwcvrfinal.pdf)

## 4

## Good campus relations

# Rumours about provision for Muslims

A university has over the last six months created a new prayer room and faith centre—which came into existence after a campaign by the university’s large Islamic society—and started serving halal food options in the canteen. Although seen by many as a success, these changes have caused unrest. Some religious groups have expressed discontent at what they feel is the privileging of the Islamic society’s concerns. Others, both staff and students, have expressed frustration at the fact that these campaigns are being listened to at all, as they see them as a concession to a politicised religious group within what should be a secular environment.

These concerns have given rise to a number of misleading rumours about the accommodations being made. For example, complaints have been made about all the food in the canteen being halal, when in fact it only applies to a few meal options. Some of the students have objected to women not being permitted in the new prayer room, even though there are no entrances to it that cannot be used by women, just one entrance that men are not permitted to use. It has also been alleged that the university, which is currently refurbishing its students’ union, is under pressure to stop selling alcohol, a rumour that a member of staff at the union describes as a “*complete lie*”. Concerns have been raised that the rumours are making hostile remarks about Muslims more common and apparently more socially acceptable.



### Issues to consider

- Is there anything that the university could do to challenge these rumours and build a better campus environment?
- Do these rumours suggest that religion ought to be in the open and publicly discussed?
- Would it have been better to have done nothing, and to have kept religious faith in private?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

Many of the measures described in this example, such as providing halal food options, are likely to form part of a university’s duty to prevent indirect discrimination. Yet in this case there appears to have been a failure to communicate the reasons for the changes. To avoid this, and to challenge false rumours about the accommodations, it is advisable for the university to keep all channels of communication open via the students’ union and ensure that processes are transparent at all times. Proposed changes to the university’s services and buildings could be communicated via notices and other means, and clear statements about the changes could be located in areas affected such as the canteens that are located on campus. It may also be advisable to give a rationale of why Islam has been taken into

account in these ways, and how other faith traditions have also been accommodated.

These rumours indicate that the campus may have problems with Islamophobia, which, although moderate, could develop into a complaint of harassment. The university may wish to respond to this by including guidance on dealing with anti-Muslim prejudice in its E&D policies on religion and belief, urging caution about stereotypes and generalisations about Islam and Muslims. The university may also choose to hold discussions on religious prejudice, making use of academics working in or visiting the university. It may also be advisable to devise a more balanced and inclusive approach to responding to religious faith which takes into account the full range of

traditions and gives clear account of why particular traditions appear to have been singled out.

### Additional options

To try and foster better relations between different religious faiths on campus the university may choose to establish an interfaith or inter-cultural group. Such a forum could be established through a religion and belief working group (RBWG), a subgroup of the university's E&D team tasked with implementation in this area.

The RBWG should be made up of staff, student and faith representatives, and could attempt to raise awareness of the network through internal communication methods (such as notices in communal areas, open meetings, information in payslips and on the university's website). It could then be used to foster better campus relations and build improved understanding of students' needs.

### Religion in the university: key choices

This example raises key questions about how universities engage with faith as a public category. A university that has traditionally been regarded as secular may wish to remain above the fray, and attempt to be strictly neutral between religious identities. If this is the case, it may try to keep at a distance from any student-led campaign for religious provision, and be as clear as possible that it does not favour any religious group in particular but responds strictly to legal requirements.

By contrast, a university that wishes to engage with forms of religious expression may take the view that part of the cause of this problem comes from the university only responding to students' concerns as and when they become apparent. Its argument might be that by emphasising the fact that faith is welcome within the institution, and by proactively providing for people's religious requirements without them having to campaign for such things, serious disagreements can be avoided. This university might choose to create facilities for all the faith traditions within a multifaith centre. Meals, festivals and other services could also be used as an opportunity for learning through displays, meetings and talks, for example.

## Available resources

Specific guidelines on making provision for religious groups can be found in the ECU's report *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Facilities and Services*:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-facilities](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-facilities)

St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace have a guide to creating prayer spaces entitled *Recovering the Calm*. They also produce the general guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Handbook*:

[www.stethelburgas.org/sites/default/files/Recovering\\_the\\_Calm.pdf](http://www.stethelburgas.org/sites/default/files/Recovering_the_Calm.pdf)

[www.stethelburgas.org/multifaith/resources](http://www.stethelburgas.org/multifaith/resources)

(St Ethelburga's can also be contacted directly about these resources at [enquiries@stethelburgas.org](mailto:enquiries@stethelburgas.org) or [info@thebusinessoffaith.org](mailto:info@thebusinessoffaith.org))

A survey of Muslim students' religious requirements has been produced by the Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) entitled *The Voice of Muslim Students*. Details of the Islamic faith that the staff of HEIs may need to be aware of can be found in the HEA's *A Guide to Islam*: [www.tiny.cc/7n4y6](http://www.tiny.cc/7n4y6)

[www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith\\_guides.html](http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html)

Details of the law on harassment on grounds of religion and belief can be found in the ACAS guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers and Employees*:

[www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/j/guide\\_religionB\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/j/guide_religionB_1.pdf)

The ECU's guide *Employing People in Higher Education: Religion and Belief* gives advice on setting up an inter-cultural group and an RBWG:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view)

General advice on promoting good campus relations can be found in the ECU/UUK report *Promoting Good Campus Relations: Dealing with Hate Crimes and Intolerance*:

[www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/promotinggoodrelations.pdf](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/promotinggoodrelations.pdf)

The above guide advocates developing interfaith and inter-cultural understanding. An introduction to this can be found in the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom (IFNUK) report *Building Good Relations on Campus*. The UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) has also produced a toolkit for bridging cultural differences which has a particular focus on international students entitled *Discussing Difference, Discovering Similarities*:

[www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/campus.pdf](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/campus.pdf)

[www.ukcisa.org.uk/files/pdf/about/material\\_media/discussing\\_difference.pdf](http://www.ukcisa.org.uk/files/pdf/about/material_media/discussing_difference.pdf)

## 5

## Good campus relations

# Extremism in the university

For the last six months a university has faced intense media scrutiny after it came to light that two of five men arrested for planning to detonate explosives in a shopping centre had studied there during the first few years of the new millennium. One of the men had been a prominent member of the university's Islamic society while a student, and speculation is now rife among commentators in the press that the society was at the time—and perhaps still is—a 'hotbed of extremism'. There have even been some allegations that the society has members that condone acts of violence upon civilians. The university has come under intense pressure to take measures to improve security on the campus, including ensuring that religious societies are closely monitored. There have also been numerous attempts by journalists to contact the society.

During this period the relationship between the university and the Islamic society has worsened considerably, with some members of the society feeling that the university has not done enough to defend them from criticism in the media. The two are now struggling to maintain any positive contact. The feeling among the senior staff at the university is that, as a pro-vice-chancellor puts it, "*We didn't get the process of talking to our students right, and didn't have the skills to engage them*". These staff are fairly certain that the Islamic society is very different now compared to the picture that is being painted of it eight years ago; and while they accept that there is still a possibility that extreme views may exist on the fringes—which they are keen to develop a response to—they are also concerned about being pressured into adopting invasive and unhelpful security measures. It is not easy to move forward, however, while there are tensions on the campus.



### Issues to consider

- What could the university have done to avoid these problems?
- How should the university now respond?
- How should university leaders manage the relationship with the Islamic society during this time?
- How should the university — and its students' societies — manage its relationship with the police and the media?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

The Acts that are most relevant are the Racial and Religious Hatred Act (2006) and the Terrorism Act (2006). The first of these makes it an offence to 'stir up hatred' against any persons on grounds of their religion. The second outlaws: acts preparatory to terrorism; encouragement to terrorism (including the 'glorification' of terrorism); and dissemination of 'terrorist publications'. What a university must do in response to these Acts is a matter for some debate. Government documents on this subject recommend the following: that appropriate mechanisms are established to deal with unlawful speech on campus; that clear policies about

acceptable use of university facilities are developed, including Internet access; that procedures are put in place to ensure that any publications or literature being held or distributed on campus can be translated quickly into English; and that clear reporting mechanisms are set up for staff and students to report any concerns within the institution, with senior staff identified to act as official contact points with the authority to make decisions about when to contact the police. In addition to this, they also recommend increasing student support by: setting up confidential help-lines and support services for those worried about friends and peers who may be being drawn toward violent extremism; briefing personal

tutors about how to deal with students who come to them with questions; and making sure all students are aware that personal and senior tutors are willing to hear any concerns they may have. However, it has been argued these measures risk restricting the individuals' rights and introducing a surveillance aspect, so they remain highly controversial (see below).

### Additional options

The worsening relationship with the Islamic society might have been avoided if the university had built a closer relationship with it, enabling them both to be resilient after the crisis broke. Possible measures that might have helped include the creation of a dedicated forum for faith groups to talk with staff at the university. The university could also have looked specifically at the provision of Muslim chaplaincy support on campus (which is also recommended in government publications on this subject), which might be able to work with both the society and other areas of the university. These measures could open and refresh interfaith and inter-cultural dialogue, and lead to a more positive culture at the university.

University leaders might have responded to this event by recognising that during this period the Muslims registered at the university, and members of the Islamic society specifically, may be under severe pressure, and offering to develop closer relations to assist them in dealing with media and wider public scrutiny. This could involve consulting the society regarding any changes to policy that were proposed in response to the episode to ensure their concerns could be heard. It might also involve helping the society to promote a positive public image by creating opportunities for other students and staff to find out about what it does. University leaders could also consider making a statement jointly with the Islamic society to the national press through its media relations officers.

### Religion in the university: key choices

Of all the challenges that university leaders face, this one tends to arouse the most concern and cause the most significant disagreements. Some may see this is a matter for the law only and not for the university, with the university staff having no role aside from complying fully with legal requirements. Some may have concerns about the potential for misleading and in some cases even Islamophobic coverage in the media to not just do damage to the university's reputation, but also to pressure it into limiting academic and religious freedom. There may be worries about, for example, restrictions being applied to discussions about the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. This may cause university leaders to respond by resisting pressure to take drastic measures and by stressing publicly that, whatever the situation when the men were at the university, the Islamic society is now open and accommodating. In particular, some may feel that close monitoring of the society, particularly by external institutions such as the police or security services, is unnecessary, unhelpful and unjust. University leaders may wish to use these arguments to take a principled stance on the matter.

One of the most significant choices that universities face in relation to this example is whether they should try to develop links with religious societies. Some university leaders may feel that the institution could benefit by taking steps to generate a culture of openness about religious faith which provides opportunities to debate religious and political issues. This may help to break down

the simplistic or conspiratorial language used, both by those who support violent extremism and in some discussions about the relationship between Islam and political violence. Within a university context, it should be possible to host discussions about the injustices and political struggles to which extremists often refer which present them in their full complexity. This may, however, cause unease in universities that see themselves as secular. Many have argued that discussing religion in these terms leads to its construction in precisely the problematic ways which generate distrust. Common sense would suggest an approach that takes the heat out of—rather than stokes—the fire.

## Available resources

General advice on promoting good campus relations can be found in the updated ECU/UUK report, *Promoting Good Campus Relations: An Institutional Imperative*. Information can also be found in the organisation's older publication *Promoting Good Campus Relations: Dealing with Hate Crimes and Intolerance*:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/promoting-good-campus-relations-update.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/promoting-good-campus-relations-update.pdf/view)

[www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/promotinggoodrelations.pdf](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Publications/Documents/promotinggoodrelations.pdf)

The UK Government's advice on this subject can be found in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) report, *Promoting Good Campus Relations, Fostering Shared Values and Preventing Violent Extremism in Universities and Higher Education Colleges*:

[www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedD/ec\\_group/22-07-HE\\_on](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedD/ec_group/22-07-HE_on)

IFNUK has published a short guide called *Looking After One Another: The Safety and Security of our Faith Communities*, which offers advice for faith groups after traumatic events:

[www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/lookingafteroneanother.pdf](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/lookingafteroneanother.pdf)

The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) briefing paper *Security, Terrorism and the UK* contains details of building resilience at times of crisis:

[www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/3271\\_bpsecurity.pdf](http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/files/3271_bpsecurity.pdf)

## 6

## Student societies and clubs

# Autonomy of student societies

Consistently over the last five years both chaplaincy and university management have struggled to maintain any kind of formal relationship with the Christian union at this university. This has caused a number of problems. The society has had uneasy relations with the Islamic society, with the two groups arranging debates where each side has attempted to 'prove' its faith is true. The society is thought to have a number of members who hold views that clash with what is taught in the university's science departments as well. As the chaplaincy co-ordinator comments, these *"people with a fundamentalist viewpoint are shutting their eyes to vast chunks of medicine—[and] there's evolution, history, geology, astronomy"*.

Most significantly, concerns have been raised that the society—or perhaps certain sections of it—demonstrates characteristics associated with 'high pressure groups'. It is rumoured, for example, that some leaders of the society focus on guilt and shame tactics, encourage members to put their meetings and activities before all other commitments, including studying, and compel students to give money to the society even if they are having financial problems. However, it has been very difficult to make a judgement about this, as the society is so isolated.



### Issues to consider

- Is there anything that the university can do to bring this society into regular contact with chaplaincy and other staff?
- Is that a wise aim, or should the society's autonomy be respected?
- Are there any policies and practices that the university could put in place to deal with the associated problems?
- Who should be responsible for dealing with the issue?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

This example has few obvious legal implications, but the university should be aware of the possibility of allegations of harassment on campus. Many universities have student support centres that students can turn to when they are facing personal difficulties. But to ensure any risk to individual students is minimised university leaders may wish to put in place formal policies and disseminate information about these services to students on campus. Such advice might contain information that would help students to recognise some of the warning signs of high pressure groups: societies that claim to have 'all

the answers'; that make their members feel unworthy; that speak in a derogatory way about their members' past social affiliations; or that see doubts and questions as signs of weak faith. The university should be very careful not to unjustly stereotype religious groups in these materials.

### Additional options

The student society in this case has been reluctant to engage with the chaplaincy service. However, there are examples from other HEIs that show that over time and with dedicated efforts by chaplaincy staff it is possible to build bridges. At one university, for example, when the new Muslim chaplain began

work in 2002 he found that the Islamic society felt wary of him, worrying they might lose their voice if there was an 'establishment figure' capable of speaking for Muslims on campus. As in the above case, the society had been involved in hostile debates with the Christian union. But by involving himself in the society's events as a participant rather than leader, the chaplain was able slowly to develop a relationship with its leaders, and has been able to convince the two societies to use a model of 'dialogue' rather than 'debate' in their meetings. University leaders might wish to use this chaplain's example as a model for staff at their HEI to follow.

If the university has an interfaith group that is made up of students as well as chaplaincy and other staff it may be possible for it to find ways of bringing these more insular societies into the open. This may come about through interfaith work by the students and chaplains, or it could be facilitated by engaging the societies in a consultation process relating to provision for faith groups or prayer and worship space within the HEI. If the university does not have such a group it might wish to consider establishing one. It might consider introducing a policy for all societies to provide positive opportunities for a public account of their activities and their contribution to university life at regular intervals.

One of the most important areas of contact between societies and the university is through a university's students' union. Religious societies tend to be affiliated with the students' union, and as part of that process the parties usually enter into discussion to ensure that the society's name corresponds with its beliefs and activities. HEI leaders may wish to enter into discussion with the students' union to establish clear guidelines about how these discussions proceed. In cases where either the students' union or a religious society feels that affiliation is not possible the HEI could encourage the parties to make use of its internal processes and procedures to resolve the issues between them. It may be that by working with the students' union problems can be avoided, and by asking for alignment with the values of openness and transparency, the students' union can help religious student societies take their place in the wider community. This may not be possible in all cases, as some religious societies may want to remain unaffiliated. Even then, though, the majority will still be committed to the university and want to build good relations with the students' union and chaplaincy.

### Religion in the university: key choices

This example can be looked at in different ways depending upon the leadership stance that a university takes. Within some universities, particularly those that conceive of themselves as neutral in relation to matters of faith and belief, the autonomy of the student body may be prioritised. This may mean that, aside from providing assistance for students with personal difficulties, they will allow the society to operate on its own terms. Similarly, a university which sees its role as being primarily to provide a qualification for a job may not be concerned with students with interpretations of the Bible or other religious texts holding views at variance with what may be taught in science lectures as long as they do not interfere.

However, a university that sees faith as a welcome part of the university experience may take a different view, regarding any isolation from the mainstream of the university's life as a missed opportunity for encounter and enrichment. It may see the evolution of isolation as an opportunity for engaging in dialogue

and debate that could start with one to one or small group interaction and grow into something broader. It is likely that community development principles and practices would inform this university's responses to isolation of parts of the university body and would seek to nip it in the bud. Such a university may also be willing to offer open discussions of the relationship between scientific and religious perspectives in open and organised conversations on campus.

## Available resources

Specific advice on the relationship between students' unions and Christian unions can be found in the ECU's *Guidelines for Students' Unions and Christian Unions*: [www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice/students-unions-and-christian-unions](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice/students-unions-and-christian-unions)

Advice on high pressure groups is publicly available on the websites of a number of US universities, including the University of California, Los Angeles:

[www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/urcfriend/pressure.html](http://www.studentgroups.ucla.edu/urcfriend/pressure.html)

## 7

## Student societies and clubs

# Religious speech on campus

This university has a number of different religious societies encompassing several of the major faith traditions: Buddhism, Protestant and Catholic Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. It is usual for these societies to have stalls at the freshers' week fair where they attract new members. In recent years, though, some of the societies have expanded significantly over the course of the year via atypical contact points. These have included the following: additional one-off on-campus events, with stalls and books; outreach programmes, where the members of the Christian union provide free food, either on-campus or outside the union bar in the evening; talks, where clerical figures have been invited to discuss their faith; and visits to halls of residence.

The university does not permit organised proselytising events by students or staff, but there is uncertainty about where to draw the line between discussions of religion and efforts to win converts. Some members of secular societies have also complained informally about an occasion when *"a group of evangelical Christians set up a tent and preached in the open space within the university courtyard"*, and suggested that some of the students at the university *"will find these activities to be intimidating, particularly because they are not afforded the freedom of walking away"*.



### Issues to consider

- Which of these activities should the university allow, and which should it discourage?
- Are there any activities that it should forbid?
- What are the risks of harassment in each of these cases?
- Are there any additional guidelines which the university ought to give to its societies about what is and is not appropriate discourse?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

In this example the university has to balance its duty to protect freedom of speech and organisation with its duty to try and prevent behaviour that could be construed as harassment or that may create an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment. To do this, university leaders might choose to develop a code of conduct outlining what are and what are not appropriate society activities. This could be developed in consultation with students and staff, and could state that while displaying information about a religious tradition or society is acceptable, such activities should only take place in public and

not in, for example, students' places of residence. It could also stress that public displays and discussions should not violate anyone's dignity or involve behaviour that could result in a complaint of harassment. Accordingly, all the above activities would be permitted apart from the visits to halls of residence, although before being given permission to hold public events societies may be required to sign up to the code of conduct and refer any external speakers to the university so that they can be checked.

At the same time, while members of secular student societies may feel that they and other students have been imposed upon, the university must bear in mind that even if students do not agree with a viewpoint there should be broad acceptance of the right of all students to express their opinions, so long as these do not contravene the law. In addition to establishing a code of conduct for religious societies to sign, it could therefore also choose to stress, perhaps in its policy on religion and belief, that in an HE context students need to remain open to other beliefs and should not see them as a threat. The exception to this would be any cases of aggressive targeted proselytism that could be interpreted as harassment. To deal with these the university may wish to put in place procedures for students and staff to report any problems, and deal with them under its disciplinary procedure.

### Additional options

To ensure that events which take place in public do not make any staff or students feel intimidated or uneasy, a university may wish to take steps to construct formal networks and points of contact which societies can liaise with when organising events. The members of these networks could include staff in chaplaincy, E&D and student support, and they could work to discuss any problems and discourage potentially intimidating or divisive behaviour, such as segregating along gender lines at events on a campus where both genders normally mix freely. They could also encourage behaviours that are open and welcoming to non-members of that society or religious tradition. In addition, the network could endeavour to create formal spaces for conversation between students with different perspectives, including spaces where secular philosophies are able to engage in conversation with religious perspectives.

### Religion in the university: key choices

In some cases, university leaders may wish to remain 'above the fray', stressing that, in any case, not all of the societies' activities can be regulated, and that societies ought to be left alone to act autonomously and informally, with the university only taking action when there are reported cases of harassment or intimidation. Where this is the case, the university might attempt to remain neutral and see forms of proselytisation that are non-aggressive as just another part of university life. The university would not make any efforts to 'police' outreach programmes and other such events, as these would be outside its role.

Other universities may wish to become more involved with the activities of religious societies. University staff might assist the societies in the organisation and marketing of events so they do not dominate a particular space and are open and appeal to a broad constituency as an opportunity for learning. These universities might see the presence of religious diversity as offering opportunities for enriching the student experience.

## Available resources

Specific advice on the relationship between students' unions and Christian unions can be found in the ECU's *Guidelines for Students' Unions and Christian Unions*:  
[www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice/students-unions-and-christian-unions](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/inclusive-practice/students-unions-and-christian-unions)

The ECU guide *Employing People in Higher Education: Religion and Belief* contains advice on this precise topic (p.40):

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view)

The IFNUK report *Good Inter Faith Relations: The Next Generation* discusses the issue of targeted student proselytism:

[www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/nationalmeeting2009.pdf](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/publications/nationalmeeting2009.pdf)

Harassment is defined in relation to religion and belief in the ACAS guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers and Employees*:

[http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/j/guide\\_religionB\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/j/guide_religionB_1.pdf)

## 8

## Student societies

## Personal harassment in a sports club

A Sikh student has recently complained informally about being harassed to some of the staff at the Department of Sports Science at this university. The student is a Khalsa Sikh, and as such follows the Five Ks, including keeping his hair uncut (*kesh*), and wearing an arm band (*kara*), comb (*kangha*), knee-length shorts (*kacchera*) and the usual small symbolic dagger (*kirpan*). He plays for a football team at the university and has said that wearing some of these garments has caused the people he plays with to make jocular, but nonetheless offensive, remarks about him. He has mentioned to the staff that he does not wish to take up the matter formally if it is possible as he recognises there is no ill will in most of the comments, but he would ideally like to be assisted by one or another of the members of staff to prevent the remarks, as they trivialise his religious beliefs. He is happy to put up with light-hearted mockery in relation to most subjects, but feels the unique significance of his beliefs is not appreciated by others.



### Issues to consider

- What responsibilities does the university have toward the student in this case?
- Which members of staff should deal with the problem?
- What policies and procedures might help prevent such cases?
- What departments should have information about how to deal with this issue?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

The university has an obligation under the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations (2003) and the Equality Act (2006) to take steps to avoid harassment on grounds of religion and belief, including actions that create an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment includes intentional bullying which is obvious or violent, but it can also be unintentional. It may involve nicknames, teasing, name calling or other behaviour which may not be intended to be malicious but nevertheless is upsetting. It may not be targeted at an individual

but consist of a general culture which appears to tolerate the telling of derogatory religious jokes. A university that fails to protect its staff and students from incidences of harassment may still be held vicariously liable for the activities of its staff. To avoid such problems universities need to ensure they make reasonable efforts to prevent harassment by implementing proper procedures and training.

### Additional options

The staff contacted by the student will need to speak with those involved in organising sporting activities, who should be able to communicate with those who have been making the remarks. It may be the case that, as the remarks in this case do not seem to be intentionally malicious, they are rooted in ignorance rather than prejudice. Better understanding could help resolve the situation, and so the staff could choose simply to communicate the significance of the student's religious beliefs and the associated practices to those involved. If this does not help, however, the staff will need to make it clear that continued harassment will be dealt with under the university's formal disciplinary procedure.

If not already in place, the university may wish to consider developing clear policy guidance to deal with instances of harassment based on a person's religion or belief. This might include a clear statement, made available through the university's website and other relevant media, making clear that harassment based on a person's religion and belief is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. This statement should also make clear that when students have concerns about harassment they will be taken seriously by all members of staff, and if they feel they are not taken seriously they can take the matter to a higher level. To make sure that these guidelines come into practice the university will need to designate a member of staff—or perhaps a number of members of staff—to deal with complaints.

Many sports centres and educational institutions have, in addition, affiliations with campaigns against racism in sport such as Kick It Out, which has a project to include more South Asian people in football. The university, and the Department of Sports Science in particular, may be able to make use of such programmes. It may be the case, however, that these programmes do not pay sufficient attention to prejudices that are linked directly to religion and belief, and so the university could consider modifying or adding to posters and publications that it currently uses to more directly address the problem of faith-based prejudice in sport.

### Available resources

Details of a university's legal obligations in relation to religion and belief, including the law relating to harassment, can be found in the ACAS guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers and Employees*:

[www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide\\_religionB\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide_religionB_1.pdf)

Details of the Sikh community in the UK and its relationship with the Muslims in Britain can be found in *The Adab — 'Respect' Programme*, a report published recently by Faith Matters:

[www.faith-matters.org/resources/publicationsreports/adab-research-report?format=pdf](http://www.faith-matters.org/resources/publicationsreports/adab-research-report?format=pdf)

Information about Sikhism that HEI leaders may need to be aware of can be found in the HEA's *A Guide to Sikhism*:

[www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith\\_guides.html](http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html)

Information about racism and other forms of harassment in football can be found on the Kick It Out website:

[www.kickitout.org](http://www.kickitout.org)

## 9

## Student support

# Religiously sensitive counselling

At a university the counselling service employs three full-time staff who offer support to both staff and students. They are well resourced, well advertised and well used, but some counsellors have raised concerns that some religious students at the university may not be accessing the service. Two possible reasons for this have been suggested. First, they suspect that some of the ethno-religious minorities feel uncomfortable going to a counsellor. The precise extent of this problem is hard for the counsellors to determine, but they suspect the following reason, as given by the university's Muslim faith adviser:

*South Asian students from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh—they tend to be very family orientated, and what happens is that they don't tend to access services. So counselling, dyslexia, disability—they don't tend to access them. It is deemed a sign of weakness; that family's seen to be weak. Some students feel they don't need to access services, because anything can be dealt with in the family, by the family, so they then tend to go back to family and the family confines the problem to themselves.*

Second, they suspect that for some of the students any personal emotional support will have to have a relationship of some sort with their faith. The counsellors—who use a variety of approaches, some more and some less accommodating of religious belief—occasionally find themselves having to make adjustments to their practice for faith-orientated students. Some also admit to a degree of uncertainty when talking to students about problems that have emerged from their specific cultural and religious backgrounds, feeling they have a lack of knowledge.

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

Although the counselling service will, like other areas of the university, have to comply with legislation regarding direct and indirect discrimination based on religion and belief, it is unlikely that this example has any legal implications in these terms. Nevertheless, the counselling service may wish to emphasise in contact with students that it is open to people of all backgrounds, and that people using the service will not be judged or treated in any way differently because of their faith or cultural background. The service might also endeavour to stress more strongly the confidential nature of their support



### Issues to consider

- Are there any changes that the counselling service could make to ensure their services are more accessible?
- Is there anything the university can do to determine whether some religious students are not making use of support services because of their faith?
- Should the university take any steps to help counsellors bridge religious differences, and if so what?

to try and reassure students and staff who feel that therapy might be seen by their peers as a sign of weakness. This faith neutral approach may not, however, fully address the concerns of students who feel that such services are not for them, so further measures may be necessary (see below).

### Additional options

It is important for any response to be based on sound information, so the university might decide to take steps to investigate the difficulties faced by students from different religious and ethnic backgrounds via a process of consultation. Although this process could involve discussions with chaplains

and religious societies, it would need to engage in conversations with other students to make sure that services are widely relevant. This could involve anonymous surveys being disseminated in communal areas. Services could then be tailored to meet newly identified needs and links made with other agencies where necessary.

Some counselling services advertise their services at the beginning of the year in 'freshers' packs', with one of the aims being to break down the stigma that can surround therapy and counselling services. These efforts often address what the sociologist Robert Bellah calls "*utilitarian individualism*": an attitude to life which stresses individual self-reliance and regards any attempt to reach out to others as an admission of weakness. But it may be helpful for the service to also address religious cultures in the same information packs.

Some universities may opt to go beyond compliance with the law, regarding the apparent reluctance of students from ethno-religious minorities to make use of their counselling service as a failure of the institution to successfully adapt to or provide for their needs. To try and rectify the problem and create an inclusive environment, the university could seek to offer guidance to the counsellors on common religion-specific dilemmas that the students at the university face. The university could make use of available resources on different religious traditions to help it to accommodate these students successfully, including consultation with the local regional faith forum. Additionally, it could make use of information gathered within the university on different people's challenges, and make contact with religiously sensitive counselling services to which referrals could be made.

### Religion in the university: key choices

The key decision in this case relates to how a university conceives of its role regarding E&D. In some cases, universities may see their role as simply to make sure obvious forms of exclusion and discrimination do not occur on campus by providing for things such as dietary needs. In others, however, a response to E&D legislation may go further, with university leaders seeing themselves as having a commitment to social justice and well-being which involves removing any barriers to the full participation of students from different ethnic, cultural, religious or class backgrounds. Therefore the response to this problem is likely to be different, involving dedicated efforts to examine and address the root causes of non-participation among certain groups of students.

The university response may also be affected by how student support is viewed. Some authors have attempted to distinguish between 'therapeutic' and 'holistic' forms of student support, the second of these taking a different view of counselling. Although it does not reject the idea of therapy as such, this approach tends to emphasise the importance of networks of support involving many areas, including peer support, pastoral support and chaplaincy as part of an effort to support the whole person. Universities that take this approach may choose to encourage the counselling service to work alongside the multifaith chaplaincy. This might allow it to offer forms of support which students from some backgrounds are more comfortable with. It could be that counselling services develop analyses of their provision rooted in the therapeutic and professional literatures and develop policies about engaging with religious students which

reflect these. It is important that religious students are not simply referred to chaplaincies as proxy providers of their counselling needs.

## Available resources

Details of the different religious traditions in the UK and what universities might need to do to accommodate them can be found in the HEA's faith guides:

[http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith\\_guides.html](http://prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html)

Some details about how students use university services, including some details about ethnic minority uptake of services, can be found in the *Student Experience Report* published by the NUS in 2008:

[www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/4017/NUS\\_StudentExperienceReport.pdf](http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/4017/NUS_StudentExperienceReport.pdf)

The UK student services organisation AMOSSHE is setting up a 'knowledge community' for those working in student services to learn from other institutions' experiences in the area of faith and belief. The organisation can be contacted by e-mail at [info@amoshe.org.uk](mailto:info@amoshe.org.uk).

My Time is a Birmingham-based counselling service that specialises in faith-sensitive counselling:

[www.mytime.org.uk/faith-sensitive-counselling](http://www.mytime.org.uk/faith-sensitive-counselling)

There are also a number of faith-based counselling services located in the UK, including: the Muslim Youth Helpline; the Raphael Jewish Counselling Service; Colindale Counselling (Hindu); Maxine Linnell (Buddhist/Christian); Association of Christian Counsellors (ACC):

[www.myh.org.uk](http://www.myh.org.uk)

[www.raphaeljewishcounselling.org](http://www.raphaeljewishcounselling.org)

[www.colindalecounselling.co.uk](http://www.colindalecounselling.co.uk)

[www.maxinelinnell.co.uk](http://www.maxinelinnell.co.uk)

[www.acc-uk.org](http://www.acc-uk.org)

(All of the services mentioned above are British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy/United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy accredited apart from the Muslim Youth Helpline, which is a member of the Telephone Helplines Association, and the ACC, which is not itself a counselling service.)

## 10

## Student support

# Faith and student finance

The staff that work in the in-house bank at this university have recently been getting a number of faith-related queries from Muslim students. In some cases, the students have asked whether the bank has any *Shari'a* compliant loans available. In others, they have asked whether taking out a student loan is permitted according to the Islamic tradition. Some have asked whether — or in what circumstances — they can make use of their overdraft facility. On some occasions students have also mentioned to the staff that they are going against their parents' wishes by taking out a loan on which interest has to be paid. As the manager of the bank comments, “*You do get some students saying, 'I'm doing this, but please make sure that my mum and dad don't know about it'.*” Given the importance of student loans and overdraft facilities to the ability of students to progress through university, some of the staff at the bank and in other areas of student support have become concerned that this could in some cases cause serious problems — if, for example, a student chose not to take out a loan or if family disagreements caused funds to be cut off. However, they do not know what advice they can offer.



### Issues to consider

- What information might be useful to these students, and where can it be found?
- Are there any other members of staff at the university who may be able offer assistance to the students who are asking these questions?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

Although the bank and other areas of the university have to comply with legislation regarding direct and indirect discrimination based on religion and belief, it is unlikely that this example has any legal implications. The university may, however, choose to respond to these dilemmas as part of an approach to E&D that goes beyond legal compliance to address religious diversity directly and remove any barriers to participation in HE.

### Additional options

The question of whether a student loan constitutes *riba* (usury) is not something on which there is agreement among Islamic scholars (*ulama*). Nor is there agreement on whether or not *riba* is permitted within a European context. Some argue, for example, that it can be justified on grounds of necessity (*darura*). Ultimately, a decision on these matters has to be left to the individual person. However, the university might consider giving students access to information and different scholarly opinions on the issue. The Financial Services Authority

(FSA) have produced guidance on the topic (see below) that can easily be made available to students who make enquiries. The bank may also, depending on its commercial position, consider offering advice on what forms of Islamic finance are available. (Currently the Islamic Bank of Britain is considering introducing an Islamic version of the student loan, but it is not available yet. Lloyds TSB offers a specific Islamic Student Account.)

The university may wish to consider conducting some internal research to assess the extent and the seriousness of the issue. To do this, it could establish a religion and belief working group, a subgroup of the university's E&D team made up of staff, students' union and faith representatives. This group could consult with students to find out about the dilemmas that they face and feed back the information they gather to the bank's staff and student support. If the university is able to determine that a significant number of students are concerned about this matter they may wish to consider producing general advice for students themselves with the bank, which all members of student support can then have access to. Indeed, they might judge that making such advice and information directly available would encourage Muslim students to feel at home in the university, and advertise them in the prospectus as a matter of principle. They may also wish to consider sharing their experiences via the nation-wide association for managers of student services, AMOSSHE.

Students who face these dilemmas while at university might also benefit from being able to talk them over with more experienced peers from their faith tradition. If the university has a Muslim faith adviser then any members of staff who come into contact with students with these questions could suggest that they go to see him/her to discuss the matter. If the university does not have a faith adviser of any sort, it could consider opening up a position, or making contact with trusted religious leaders in the local area. Creating links between finance officers, student support and chaplaincies, and public demonstrations of their partnership approach, could be very helpful.

### Religion in the university: key choices

This example raises questions about whether it is appropriate for universities to offer advice that might seem religious in nature. Many universities, particularly those that see themselves as secular institutions, are likely to be reluctant to offer Islam-specific advice, and might want to refrain from commenting on the issue of whether or not a particular product offered by a bank or the Student Loans Company is 'Islamically valid'. Yet where students have specific queries some universities may want to provide them with assistance. Some may see this as part of a broader commitment to try and remove any possible barriers to participation or obstacles students might face to completing their courses. Others may be more willing to support a culture of open dialogue around religious faith. In such cases, university leaders may see a role for offering internal or external advice.

## Available resources

The FSA, the body that regulates all the financial service providers in the UK, has set up a project to build financial capability amongst students in the UK HE sector called The Money Doctors. It covers all aspects of student finance and has conducted research on the issue of Islam and student finance. Some advice is available in its research publications:

[www.fsa.gov.uk/financial\\_capability/pdfs/Section%206\\_Research.pdf](http://www.fsa.gov.uk/financial_capability/pdfs/Section%206_Research.pdf)

[www.fsa.gov.uk/financial\\_capability/pdfs/md\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.fsa.gov.uk/financial_capability/pdfs/md_factsheet.pdf)

A variety of different Islamic scholars' perspectives on interest, mortgages and loans has been produced in a Q&A format by the organisation Maslaha:

[www.maslaha.org](http://www.maslaha.org)

<http://lovelyeffusion.co.uk/islamic-answers/themes/thinking-allowed/money-and-employment?show=intro>

The Muslim Youth Helpline is a charity offering advice to young Muslims on these and other similar issues:

[www.myh.org.uk](http://www.myh.org.uk)

AMOSSHE is setting up a 'knowledge community' for those working in student services to learn from other institutions' experiences in the area of faith and belief. The organisation can be contacted by e-mail at [info@amoshe.org.uk](mailto:info@amoshe.org.uk).

## 11

## Chaplaincy

# Recognition of chaplains

A university has had a small Anglican chaplaincy for the last few decades. It is run by a member of the clergy who splits his time between his local parish and the university. In recent years, the student support team has been considering moving toward a multifaith chaplaincy model, which they hope will eventually have links with faith advisers from all the major religious traditions. The plan has the support of the university's senior management team and the chaplain himself, but a number of complications have arisen as it has been put into action. The most difficult area has been the recognition given to different faith advisers.

One of the larger religious student societies is linked to liberation theology (a movement which has sometimes been charged with being Marxist and even revolutionary), and is run with the assistance of a cleric with no formal church affiliation. The university also has two Jewish societies, one linked with the nation-wide University Jewish Chaplaincy (UJC) and the other with the Chabad Lubavitch movement, which has an 'evangelising' role and looks to bring Jewish students 'back to Judaism'. The university is reluctant to have too many advisers listed, but the societies that these chaplains serve are both large, much larger than the fairly small Sikh and Hindu societies. The chaplain from the Chabad Lubavitch movement has complained informally about feeling excluded from the university. He has asked to be "*recognised as a chaplain of the university, which would give me status and, ideally, financial reward too*".



### Issues to consider

- What different strategies could the university employ when deciding who to give recognition to?
- What can the university do to work out what the students need?
- What different kinds of recognition is the university able to offer?
- Are there any E&D issues that are relevant?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

Universities are not obliged to provide a faith adviser for each religious tradition, and are not required to make any adjustments that would require significant expenditure. Nevertheless, it is good practice to provide for different faith groups, either on an equal or proportional basis or at least based upon demand. However, doing this can present certain difficulties. One problem is that different faith communities often have access to different financial and material resources. In some universities chaplains are funded or part-funded by a particular diocese, which means

that they are able to dedicate more time to their students. Some universities, particularly those that have Christian foundations, also have longstanding Anglican chaplaincy posts. This gives universities an incentive to create voluntary or funded chaplaincy positions for other faiths. The difficulty here, though, is that if a university financially supports one chaplain and not another (for example, Muslim but not Jewish) it may attract criticism for favouring one tradition above the others. Indeed, it might invite claims that it is discriminating against those traditions which do not receive funding. The

reasoning for all decisions will therefore have to be made clear to everyone concerned.

### Additional options

The trend in many universities is for the established (and in most cases Anglican) clerical figure to take on a role as the multifaith chaplain, with that role consisting both of pastoral duties and co-ordination of the process by which other faith advisers are recognised by the university. In such cases recognition of the different religious leaders can be left to the chaplaincy co-ordinator's personal experience, and he or she can identify advisers in the local area where necessary. This has the benefit of being cost effective as it requires few extra resources. This can be complemented by giving volunteers from different religious traditions partial recognition and status. The leaders of different religious societies and local religious leaders contacted by the chaplaincy co-ordinator could be given, for example, freedom to operate on campus, access to information about booking rooms, and a weekly slot in the available chaplaincy building. By giving faith advisers clearly defined roles they are likely to be more effective and 'at home' in an HE context.

### Religion in the university: key choices

This case raises questions about the place of chaplaincy within the internal structure of the university's support services. A university that sees itself as neutral may be reluctant to fully include different chaplaincy services and faith advisers, or for religious figures to have a formal relationship with other members of staff. It may be seen as best for the chaplaincy to be effectively a semi-autonomous space, separate from other university settings. In a university that prioritises collegiality, on the other hand, it may be considered best in the long term for the chaplaincy co-ordinator and other faith advisers to have a wider role in student services so that they can build links with other areas of student support.

Of course, there may be individuals in university settings who incline toward a more aggressively secular stance based on 'hard neutrality', and who will question the place of religious advisers within a public institution. Although HEIs must try to avoid indirect discrimination by making allowances for religious observance, it may be argued that they have no obligation to provide any chaplains or faith advisers, so no religious staff should be officially recognised. Although this would not be an entirely invalid argument, there are serious questions that might be raised about whether such an approach provides a positive student experience, and if some members of faith groups may be put off HE as a result.

## Available resources

A comprehensive study of university chaplaincy has been undertaken for the Church of England Board of Education by Jeremy Clines entitled *Faith in Higher Education Chaplaincy*. It offers a number of chaplaincy models:

[www.cofe.org.uk/info/education/hefe/he/faithsinhe/fihecsomm.pdf](http://www.cofe.org.uk/info/education/hefe/he/faithsinhe/fihecsomm.pdf)

In addition, Ataullah Siddiqui's report *Islam at Universities in England: Meeting the Needs and Investing in the Future* contains a detailed discussion of Muslim chaplaincy and its possible futures:

[www.mihe.org.uk/mihe/upload/documents/siddiqui\\_report2007.pdf](http://www.mihe.org.uk/mihe/upload/documents/siddiqui_report2007.pdf)

The ECU guide *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Facilities and Services* gives general guidance on chaplaincy roles (p. 6):

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/Religious-obs-facilities-and-services-briefing.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/Religious-obs-facilities-and-services-briefing.pdf/view)

The ECU guide *Employing People in Higher Education: Religion and Belief* gives advice on setting up a religion and belief working group:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view)

## 12

## Chaplaincy Establishing a GOR

The chaplaincy at a university has had a church-funded Anglican chaplain for a number of years, and the university is now considering providing equal funding for a Muslim chaplain in response to advice contained in reports to government and to demand from students and staff. There is a good deal of support for the appointment, but there is unease among staff about two things. First, if the post is agreed it will be a genuine occupational requirement (GOR) for the post holder to be a Muslim. The university is uncertain about how to ensure that it advertises and recruits for the post without contravening E&D legislation. Second, some of the members of the appointments committee are concerned that it might unfairly advantage Muslim students if the university funds a Muslim chaplain and not Hindu, Buddhist and Jewish chaplains as well. Funding all of these posts would place serious pressure on financial resources at a time when other areas of the university are at risk of cuts, but the committee members are concerned that to only fund one religious tradition could be considered discriminatory.



### Issues to consider

- What precautions will the university have to take to ensure it stays within the law concerning GORs?
- Are the staff on the appointment committee right to be concerned about discriminating against other traditions?
- Is there anything the university can show to justify its stance?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

The law will only allow employers to treat applicants differently on the grounds of religion or belief if possessing a particular religion or belief is a determining occupational requirement for that post. If an employer wishes to claim a GOR he or she must consider what the duties are for which an exemption is to be claimed, and carry out an assessment to make sure that it would be unreasonable to require other employees to undertake those duties. Someone who is employed as a religious professional to serve a particular faith group will almost certainly have to be a member of that group, so a GOR should apply in this case. GORs

should be identified before the vacancy is advertised, and any advertisements and material sent to potential applicants should clearly show that the employer considers that a GOR applies. The point should also be reiterated during the selection process. The situation should be reassessed on each occasion the post becomes vacant to ensure that the GOR can still be validly claimed, and the basis on which all decisions are made should be communicated clearly to everyone, including both students and staff.

### Additional options

One way in which university leaders could justify their decision to claim a GOR exemption for just one or two religious faiths is by basing it on the HEIs own internal and wider community needs and demographics. By making sure that it makes provision which reflects its religious makeup, the university will be able to counter the claim that it has favoured one religious faith over another. In this case, if there are more Muslim students who have expressed the desire for regular access to a clerical figure then the HEIs choice could be justified. However, it would be very important for the university to consult with other religious groups so that the decision can be made based upon sound information. The university would also benefit from making appointments which sympathise intelligently with all faith traditions without requiring any particular religious affiliation to be spelt out. Volunteer chaplains are also a useful resource in extending the capacity of paid posts.

Another option for a university that seeks to provide a chaplaincy which reflects the needs of students, staff and the wider community is to create a post which specifies the general requirement that the appointee must demonstrate expertise working with many faith traditions. This might mean that, in common with many Anglican chaplains in universities in the UK, the Muslim chaplain appointed by the university would have to balance his or her pastoral role with a broader multifaith role. The new chaplain might help with the events of other religious groups, for example. This could make a GOR harder to claim, though, as the whole role would not be religiously specific. GORs are always open to challenge, the burden of proof being on the employer to establish its validity.

### Available resources

Details of what can be considered a GOR can be found on the Equality and Human Rights Commission website:

[www.equalityhumanrights.com/your-rights/religion-and-belief/when-does-the-law-allow-religious-discrimination/a-genuine-occupational-requirement/](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/your-rights/religion-and-belief/when-does-the-law-allow-religious-discrimination/a-genuine-occupational-requirement/)

A more detailed account of the law relating to GORs can be found in Appendix 1 (pp. 35-36) of the ACAS guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers and Employees*:

[www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide\\_religionB\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide_religionB_1.pdf)

Descriptions of various chaplaincy models, and their advantages and disadvantages, can be found in the Church of England Board of Education's report by Jeremy Clines, *Faiths in Higher Education Chaplaincy*:

[www.cofe.anglican.org/info/education/hefe/he/faithsinhe/fihecsomm.pdf](http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/education/hefe/he/faithsinhe/fihecsomm.pdf)

Ataullah Siddiqui's report *Islam at Universities in England: Meeting the Needs and Investing in the Future* offers a justification for university-funded chaplaincy posts:

[www.mihe.org.uk/mihe/upload/documents/siddiqui\\_report2007.pdf](http://www.mihe.org.uk/mihe/upload/documents/siddiqui_report2007.pdf)

## 13

## Teaching and curricula

# References to religion

The head of the Department of Anthropology at a university has in recent years encountered a number of difficulties related to religion in lectures and tutorial groups. Many of these appear to stem from an increased interest in religion among the students in her department. One lecturer, who describes himself as agnostic, has mentioned to her that it is becoming increasingly common for his students to make reference to their faith within classes. He does not always know how best to deal with these references, partly because he is not always comfortable with the personal dimension, and partly because he says he does not have sufficient knowledge of his students' beliefs. Another lecturer has received complaints that alleged she made disparaging remarks about religious belief in classes. One of the students objected, for instance:

*In one of my first lectures—it was horrible—the professor cracked a joke about religious people and evolution, and it was specifically related to Christians. Like, if he had said that about another religious group it would have been a problem because it would have been considered rude but because it's Christian it's okay to have an intellectual dig.*



### Issues to consider

- How might the department respond to the students bringing up comments about faith or who make sense of their work in religious terms?
- How should the department respond to the complaints about the trivialisation of students' religious beliefs?
- Are there any specific legal implications?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

The Education Reform Act (1988) places a duty on HEIs to ensure that academic staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in danger of losing their jobs or any institutional privileges they may have. But staff should also not violate anyone's dignity or create an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment, which could constitute harassment according to the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Regulations (2003) and the Equality Act (2006). Any formal complaint would have to be investigated in the usual way and the reasons for any decision clearly stated, taking into consideration the manner in which the subject was discussed by the lecturer and the genuine concern of any students. Yet in this case only if there were concerns that

the lecturer was stirring up hatred or infringing the rights and freedoms of others would there be a valid reason to consider taking disciplinary action or restricting her freedom of expression.

### Additional options

One way in which complaints like this one might be avoided is by producing guidelines that are made available to both academic and support staff. Ideally these could outline what does and what does not constitute offensiveness, harassment or behaviour that could be construed as intimidating. The policy could stress, for example, that disagreement with claims made by religious people or groups and criticisms of unethical or anti-intellectual behaviour should not be stifled. But it might also stress that repeatedly making pejorative

generalisations about religious believers may be unacceptable and uncondusive to learning.

A university that seeks to respond to the religious diversity of its students might choose to encourage its teachers and lecturers to pay attention to and engage with religious attitudes and beliefs, and give guidance on doing so. Such guidance might stress the importance of recognising when lecture topics relate to questions of religious belief, such as when questions emerge about the nature and status of human life, or when questions arise that have moral or metaphysical dimensions. It could also include tips on how to discuss these questions in seminars successfully, advising seminar leaders, among other things: to be clear about the aims of the discussion; to break down formal hierarchies to enable the free and honest flow of ideas in conversation; and to acknowledge that anyone, including staff, can feel vulnerable when entering discussions of these topics.

One thing that a commitment to equality and social justice is often thought to involve is recognition that certain historical experiences and events might mean different things to different cultural and religious groups. For example, the study of the history of colonisation and slavery, the Holocaust and the Reformation might affect people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds differently. A university that has as one of its aims a commitment to religious literacy might encourage teachers and lecturers to be aware of this in classes and seminars. This might involve leaving more space in seminar groups for personal reflection on lecture topics, or making it clear in essay questions that such reflections are welcome provided they are intellectually rooted and the intellectual implications are drawn out.

### Religion in the university: key choices

This example raises complicated questions about the role that educators have with regard to their students. In some universities, and in some disciplinary contexts, the staff may feel that students do not—perhaps should not—need to have a personal relationship with what is being taught.

By contrast, some educationalists argue that within HE students tend to develop more complex epistemological beliefs, and that education should offer opportunities to develop one's identity by engaging in epistemological debates and exploring alternative ontologies. For some, this can mean: dealing with internalised oppression; mediating among multiple identities; and including information about other religious, spiritual or cultural practices. A university that regards the personal development of students as centrally important may choose to incorporate religious considerations into aspects of teaching and learning where they have intellectual currency or epistemological resonance. This will not always be possible and/or suitable in some disciplines, or at least the questions will emerge in different ways in different disciplines. But where moral or theological questions emerge, or where deep philosophical debates are taking place, it may be relevant. It is advisable that comments on and references to religious faith in such contexts are kept impersonal, and are related to intellectual debate and argument.

## Available resources

Details of what constitutes harassment on grounds of religion and belief can be found in the ACAS guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers and Employees*:

[www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide\\_religionB\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide_religionB_1.pdf)

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators in the US has published a guide called *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* which contains details on personal development in learning:

[www.myacpa.org/pub/documents/LearningReconsidered.pdf](http://www.myacpa.org/pub/documents/LearningReconsidered.pdf)

Some of the questions raised above are mentioned in the *Wingspread Declaration on Religion and Public Life: Engaging Higher Education*, which is produced by the Society for Values in Higher Education in the US:

[www.aacu.org/meetings/faculty/2006/documents/Wingspread.pdf](http://www.aacu.org/meetings/faculty/2006/documents/Wingspread.pdf)

The Public Conversations Project in the US provides a number of guides to discussing difficult topics, including their report *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*:

[www.publicconversations.org](http://www.publicconversations.org)

[www.publicconversations.org/docs/resources/Jams\\_website.pdf](http://www.publicconversations.org/docs/resources/Jams_website.pdf)

Mark U Edwards Jr has written an article discussing the ways in which religion and academic practice intersect in *Bulletin*, a magazine published by the Harvard Divinity School:

[www.hds.harvard.edu/news/bulletin\\_mag/articles/34-3\\_edwards.html](http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news/bulletin_mag/articles/34-3_edwards.html)

The same author has also published a book on the topic entitled *Religion on Our Campuses* (London: Macmillan, 2006).

R J Nash *et al's* book *How to Talk About Hot Topics on Campus* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008) includes a detailed guide to discussing personal beliefs in seminar groups.

Further reflection on how to talk about personal belief in HE can be found in D Jacobsen and R H Jacobsen's book *The American University in a Postsecular Age* (Oxford: OUP, 2008).

An account of learner-centred teaching can be found in Elizabeth J Tisdell's book *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult and Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

## 14

## Teaching and curricula

# Foundational knowledge

Over the last half-decade this university has successfully implemented a widening participation strategy, the main aim of which was to increase the number of applicants to the university from the local area. A large proportion of its student population now comes from close by, many from the sizeable Bengali Muslim community which has been until recently under-represented. Successful though this strategy has been, concerns have been raised by some of the lecturers and by staff at the Centre for Lifelong Learning that some of the local students lack what one of the tutors terms “foundational knowledge”.

The Bengali Muslim students are mainly the second generation of immigrant families from rural backgrounds, and have tended not to take up humanities disciplines, which raise obvious epistemological dilemmas, with those that do often appearing to struggle. One of the senior lecturers worries that the university is too frequently “*ignoring the influence of religion, and how religion is mediated through a rural culture*”. It needs, he argues, to give the students at the university a better understanding of “the values that our institutions embody, which we embody as a result of our distinctive history and our distinctive conflicts”. At the moment, he believes, the undergraduates are not being given necessary forms of social capital and cultural literacy. As he puts it himself:

*I don't think they're getting the skills and competences that they need to survive outside this city and that would be disastrous for them—and disastrous for the city too, really.*



### Issues to consider

- What can the university do to assess the extent of the problem, and see if the lecturer is correct?
- Are there any alternative ways of looking at the issue?
- What practical strategies could help transmit the kind of foundational knowledge that is not being taught?
- Is it important that they have this knowledge and is it the university's responsibility and role to provide it?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

There are no immediate legal implications in this case, but there are policy guidelines. For many universities, the number of students who go on to get jobs commensurate with their qualifications is a key performance indicator. Therefore even universities that view themselves as neutral with regards religious faith, and that do not usually regard it as necessary to respond to a student's cultural or religious background, may be concerned at the prospect of a particular section

of the student population underperforming against employability criteria.

### Additional options

University leaders will want to make sure that the perception is correct. To do this the university may wish to examine the data it collects on ethnicity and see if any significant differences emerge. If it collects data on religion, as advocated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and

the ECU, it could examine that as well. If it can be shown that the lecturer's concerns are valid then they may wish to take action to rectify the problem, possibly by creating additional elective or even compulsory courses which seek to help students understand better the particular history and character of the UK and the epistemologies which have hegemony in its universities. Such courses might contain historical, political and religious aspects. Also, the university could formulate policy guidelines for teaching staff. This might involve giving advice on measures to identify students who are struggling with specifically Western epistemologies which they may not recognise with the same readiness, and direct them to resources, learning tools and additional support within the university.

Recent publications (see below) have also examined the role played by religious institutions in formative education, and suggested that it may be useful for universities to build relationships with such institutions to help religious communities relate traditional forms of religious knowledge to the complexities of modern Britain. (The Muslim College in Ealing, for example, has links with Birkbeck, University of London.) A university that sets as one of its aims the formulation of a conscious response to Britain's religious and cultural diversity might use available academic and other resources to look into the character of the local religious institutions and potentially attempt to develop a working relationship with some of them. Some cathedral group universities are likely to have experience in making these links and could be a resource to other institutions.

### Religion in the university: key choices

This example raises complicated questions both about the role that educators have with regard to their students, and the role universities have serving the communities in their local area. In some universities, the process of obtaining a degree may be viewed as essentially a matter of gaining skills or a particular qualification that can be used to advance along a specific career path. Within such contexts, religion and other forms of cultural knowledge may be seen as essentially irrelevant, even as an unnecessary distraction. However, in this case, if the lecturer quoted in the example is correct, precisely the absence of this kind of knowledge is preventing certain groups of students from making progress even within these terms. They may therefore find a rationale for engagement with certain religious traditions.

## Available resources

The difficulties in transmitting foundational knowledge to younger members of religious minorities have been analysed in Philip Lewis's recent book *Young, British and Muslim* (London: Continuum, 2007).

The differences in educational attainment between different religious groups can be observed at the national level in Nabil Khattab's article 'Ethno-religious background as a determinant of educational and occupational attainment in Britain' in *Sociology* 43 (2) (2009), pp.304-322.

The most influential book that advocates placing greater emphasis upon this aspect of education is E D Hirsch's book *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (New York: Vintage, 1988).

The relationship between the HE sector and the teaching of Islam has been explored in Ataullah Siddiqui's report *Islam at Universities in England: Meeting the Needs and Investing in the Future* and in the HEFCE report *Islamic Studies: Trends and Profiles*:

[www.mihe.org.uk/mihe/upload/documents/siddiqui\\_report2007.pdf](http://www.mihe.org.uk/mihe/upload/documents/siddiqui_report2007.pdf)

[www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/HEFCE/2008/08\\_09/08\\_09.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/HEFCE/2008/08_09/08_09.pdf)

The reasons why universities might choose to monitor for religion and belief are explored in the HEFCE report *Equality and Diversity Monitoring in Higher Education Institutions: A Guide to Good Practice* and the ECU report *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Facilities and Services*:

[www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2004/04\\_14/04\\_14.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2004/04_14/04_14.pdf)

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/Religious-obs-facilities-and-services-briefing.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/Religious-obs-facilities-and-services-briefing.pdf/view)

The Multifaith Centre at the University of Derby has produced a comprehensive guide to the different institutions and traditions in the UK titled *Religions in the UK: A Multi-faith Directory*.

## 15

## Food and accommodation

# Religious observance in halls of residence

There are five different halls of residence at this university, three of which are self-catering. There is a significant Jewish minority at the university, and difficulties have emerged in meeting their religious needs. Some of the students who come to the university keep a strictly kosher diet, with all the preparatory requirements that this involves. This does not, however, apply to all the Jewish students, some of whom do not keep kashrut or just avoid pork and do not adhere to the preparatory aspect. There is no formal policy that applies to all the five halls of residence, meaning that in practice, as one of the third-year students at the university puts it, some of the halls are “*very good*” while others are “*completely clueless*”. On the odd occasion this has resulted in minor conflicts between residents living in the halls of residence when the observant students have tried—without much success—to keep some utensils and worktops in the communal kitchen separate.



### Issues to consider

- What should the university do to determine the levels of need in this case, and to negotiate difficulties?
- Is the university legally obliged to make accommodations for religious dietary requirements?
- What can the halls do to organise more effectively for religious requirements?
- How should the university communicate any accommodations?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

Legally, a university is required to avoid all forms of indirect discrimination, which means any practice that, although applied to all, disadvantages a specific religious group. Only if a practice constitutes a genuine business need can it be justified legally. In effect, this means that while HEIs are not obliged to provide facilities for religious observance in the workplace, they must do what they can to avoid causing religiously observant individuals serious disadvantage, which may be relevant here. If in this case the university had only one hall that had only one kitchen for all the students to use, the university might be able to argue that

it cannot make special arrangements for those who eat only kosher food. In the majority of universities, however, there are a number of halls of residence, so if a complaint were to be raised it might be upheld in a court or tribunal. The university should, therefore, take the students' problems seriously and provide a clear response. Whatever decision it comes to, it is important that the HEIs decision-making process is transparent and is communicated clearly to all those involved.

### Additional options

If each hall is left to organise its provision for religion and belief at an individual level the HEI is likely to find it hard to cater for all faiths. The best strategy may therefore be for a university-wide plan to be developed. This may not just relate to the provision of cooking facilities that are kosher: it may be of benefit to the university to strategise for other issues, such as gender norms and the consumption of alcohol. In formulating such a plan there are numerous issues for university leaders to consider. Firstly, it is important that universities avoid inadvertently setting up 'religious ghettos' around kitchens in halls that are suitable for specific religious backgrounds. As a general rule, if university leaders are considering meeting a request for a kitchen area to be designated for halal or kosher use only, this should prompt consideration of whether alternative communal spaces should also be created to ensure the continued integration of faith groups and to prevent, for example, all the Muslim students being based in one floor in one hall.

In addition, it is important to remember that a person's place of residence in his or her first year at university is usually decided before arrival. It may be the case that some students will not consider a hall or even a whole university as an option because it does not make arrangements for the observance of religious belief, in this and other areas. Consequently, it may be in an HEI's best interests to communicate any measures taken to accommodate specific religious groups in the materials it uses to attract new students, emphasising this in the prospectus and on its website. This will support aspirations to social justice by making the university accessible to a wider range of potential students (and staff).

It may be that the complaints made in relation to religious observance only represent the surface of a problem that goes much deeper. In some cases, students may prefer to remain religiously observant, but will refrain from complaining as they do not want to cause any trouble for staff. This may mean that a more proactive strategy is required. To assess the necessary measures that should be taken, an HEI may choose to monitor for religion and belief or conduct an impact assessment, as advocated by HEFCE and the ECU. Alternatively, the university could establish a religion and belief working group, a subgroup of the university's E&D team made up of staff, students' union and faith representatives. This group could consult with students to assess the need for different accommodations.

### Religion in the university: key choices

In this example, the university can respond in a number of different ways. The basic option is simply to respond to the law, thus preventing indirect discrimination, and go no further. Nevertheless it is difficult to determine what this compliance would look like and some options may produce perverse outcomes, for example inadvertent ghettoisation. Beyond that, the university can choose to develop a more comprehensive response as part of its efforts to attract a diverse student body. It could also go still further, making efforts to avoid negative instances such as those that occurred in the above case in which religious observance becomes a cause of tension between students. This could be by trying to build a positive culture by facilitating interfaith conversations, or by offering opportunities for students of faith to engage those who have no specific belief in a conversation about their practices. Such opportunities might

take a variety of forms, ranging from discussions in the hall in question to dedicated university-wide events or 'faith days' where religious societies are able publicly to explain their beliefs and practices. Cookery demonstrations and shared meals have also proved helpful in some cases.

### Available resources

Details of a university's legal obligations in relation to religion and belief can be found in the ACAS guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers and Employees* and the ECU's guide *Employing People in Higher Education: Religion and Belief*:

[www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide\\_religionB\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide_religionB_1.pdf)

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view)

The ECU has produced a guide to making provision for faith groups called *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Facilities and Services*. The same organisation also provides a guide specifically aimed at accommodation providers entitled *Handbook for Student Accommodation Providers: Support and Guidance for Equality and Diversity* (it discusses the above issue directly on p. 83):

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/Religious-obs-facilities-and-services-briefing.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/Religious-obs-facilities-and-services-briefing.pdf/view)

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/student-accommodation-providers-handbook.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/student-accommodation-providers-handbook.pdf/view)

HEFCE has produced a guide entitled *Equality and Diversity Monitoring in Higher Education Institutions: A Guide to Good Practice*. A general guide to impact assessments in HEIs has been produced by the ECU entitled *Conducting Equality Impact Assessments in Higher Education*:

[www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2004/04\\_14/04\\_14.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2004/04_14/04_14.pdf)

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/conducting-equality-impact-assessments.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/conducting-equality-impact-assessments.pdf/view)

Details of Judaism can be found in the HEA's *A Guide to Judaism*:

[www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith\\_guides.html](http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html)

## 16

## Food and accommodation

# Choice in the college canteen

On account of its being located a good distance away from the nearest metropolitan area, this university has to provide almost all of the food for its students (and daytime food for its staff) on campus. The canteens at the university are all subcontracted to an external company, which does not make obvious provision for those with specific dietary requirements apart from vegetarians and vegans. Recently the Islamic society has begun a campaign to get more halal food on the menu, arguing that it is a breach of equalities law for no provision to be made for Muslim students. The Jewish society has also raised objections. The staff at the university have only limited control over the company between contract setting, but have an interest in making sure that the issue does not escalate.



### Issues to consider

- Does failing to supply food of a particular sort contravene equalities legislation?
- Whose liability would it be?
- What can the university do to negotiate with the Islamic society, and reach an amicable solution?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

A university that contracts out services such as catering to external companies may be liable for the actions of these companies in the delivery of procured services. To avoid liability it must be able to prove that it has taken reasonable steps to prevent any unlawful discrimination, direct or indirect. In an HEI in which on-site facilities have a local monopoly the charge of indirect discrimination against students who have specific dietary requirements will be particularly hard to avoid as those students will find it very difficult to purchase meals. Therefore the university will need to liaise with the company to arrange for suitable provision, ensuring the correct storage, preparation and display of foods and provision of utensils. It is unlikely that

it could argue that religious students should provide their own food in circumstances in which it is being provided for everybody else.

### Additional options

To prevent confusion, it may be helpful if university leaders take steps to ensure information is widely available about on-campus outlets that have made provision for religious dietary requirements, with information being placed in halls of residence, the students' union and other public areas. Such information could helpfully be linked to a wider statement of the university's position in relation to religious faith and religious literacy. It may also help if any vegetarian or vegan

options that are available on-site are listed alongside any foods which have been prepared in accordance with the norms of a specific religious tradition, as these foods may be a viable alternative in many cases.

Responding to requests from what may only be a fairly small number of students may result in rather limited outcomes. Different members of faith groups may choose to observe dietary requirements less strictly, differently or not at all. Within the Jewish tradition, in particular, the kosher rule is widely observed, but with differing interpretations. Effective consultation with staff—especially chaplaincies—and a wide range of students will help HEIs determine the full range of different dietary requirements. To do this HEI leaders whose aim is to respond to the religious diversity in their university may wish to make use of, or establish, a religion and belief working group. This group could consult with different faith groups to try and find out if there are any differences in observance, particular problem areas on campus or areas in the university (such as bars) from which a portion of the student population feels excluded.

In the above example, the campaign by the student society to ensure that adequate provision is made for Muslims on campus appears to risk causing disagreements. There have been examples in some universities of students from other religious communities feeling their requirements and options are not being listened to because they are not as vocal, and of non-religious students feeling uneasy with campaigns for religious provision. This can be looked on as another reason for consulting with many different student and staff groups, as above, and also for making sure the response of university leaders to any demands is openly communicated.

### Religion in the university: key choices

In this case, although all universities will need to make efforts to respond to the law, there are a number of choices that can be made about how far to go in making those with particular religious affiliations welcome on campus. Some university leaders may feel that it is worthwhile going some way beyond what is required by law, and making efforts to link up accommodations for students with other forms of religious observance and celebration. Such a university might, for example, permit certain shared or public meals to feature religious blessings or overtones, with different faiths being represented at different points in the week or on the days of religious festivals. These could be timetabled in using an in-house faith calendar, or the BBC's (see below). In these ways food can be used as a mode for celebrating and exploring diversity across the whole university and a focus for seeing religions as an opportunity for enriching the learning environment. In many religions, shared meals have significance because the notion of hospitality is so central. Such meals can foster a sense of equality and happiness more generally.

## Available resources

Details of a university's legal obligations in relation to religion and belief can be found in the ACAS guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers and Employees* and the ECU's guide *Employing People in Higher Education: Religion and Belief*:

[www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/j/guide\\_religionB\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/j/guide_religionB_1.pdf)

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view)

A guide to testing for 'reasonable accommodation' is provided by St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace in their guide *Religious Diversity in the Workplace*:

[www.stethelburgas.org/sites/default/files/Religious Diversity in the Workplace V11.pdf](http://www.stethelburgas.org/sites/default/files/Religious Diversity in the Workplace V11.pdf)

(St Ethelburga's can also be contacted directly about these resources at [enquiries@stethelburgas.org](mailto:enquiries@stethelburgas.org) or [info@thebusinessoffaith.org](mailto:info@thebusinessoffaith.org))

A university's liability for services that are contracted out is discussed explicitly in the ECU's *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Facilities and Services* (p. 5). IFNUK's website also has a guide to catering for multifaith events which has information about different religious requirements:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/Religious-obs-facilities-and-services-briefing.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/Religious-obs-facilities-and-services-briefing.pdf/view)

[www.interfaith.org.uk/local/catering.htm](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/local/catering.htm)

Details about Islam can be found in the HEA's *A Guide to Islam*:

[www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith\\_guides.html](http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html)

The BBC website contains arguably the most comprehensive and up-to-date calendar of religious festivals:

[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/)

## 17

## Alcohol, bars and events

# End of term celebrations

The secretaries at the School of Biological Science at this university have for a number of years arranged semi-official end of term celebrations for final-year students, to which both students and staff are invited. It usually takes place in one of the larger bars in the students' union, with the catering staff providing light snacks. It is well attended, but after the most recent event one of the lecturers commented that a significant minority did not participate, and that this seemed to happen year after year. He recounted a conversation he had had with a small group of students in his tutorial group who had said they felt the event “*was not for them*”. According to the lecturer, the students suggested that the event was in keeping with a student lifestyle from which they felt excluded, partly on account of their beliefs. The people who organise the event are reluctant to change anything about it significantly, but as it is part-funded by the department other members of staff feel they ought to make it more accessible.



### Issues to consider

- Are there any ways that the department could try to get a more accurate picture of the situation?
- How can and should this problem be dealt with?
- Should the university feel obliged to make adjustments for religious minorities?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

As not attending these celebrations does not constitute a barrier to completion of a degree course, it is unlikely that there will be legal implications in not altering the event. Nevertheless, it does appear that some students feel unable to fully participate in this aspect of university life, and the university may wish to do certain things to ensure that students are not unduly excluded. For example, at each event care could be taken to provide some food which: is vegetarian, and avoids all animal products in preparation; contains no eggs (for Jains and some Hindus) or root vegetables (for some Jains); avoids pork (for Jews and Muslims); and which has been prepared in such a way that it is kosher (for Jews) and halal (for Muslims). It may also help to arrange events

in such a way that they do not marginalise those who do not drink alcohol, either for health or religious reasons. This might mean organising events that are alcohol free, where it is clear that non-alcoholic drinks will be available and/or where excessive drinking will be discouraged.

### Additional options

There are a number of ways in which a university could try to find out whether or not certain groups feel unable to use some services or participate in events. Data on student experience suggests students from ethnic and religious minority backgrounds use some services less (see below). University leaders might wish to examine any data the university collects

on student experience to see if this is the case for their institution. A university can also look into the problem via other means such as a religion and belief working group. This group could consult with students from religious societies and more broadly within the department to look at the issue.

The problem that is identified by the lecturer in this example may have causes that go beyond the character of this specific event, raising questions about how a university develops links between different groups of students within a department and fosters cohesion on campus. Leaders and managers working at departmental or at university level may choose to try and build bridges between students who may not come into personal contact with one another by creating new opportunities for students to meet socially. This could possibly be done via the creation of an interfaith or inter-cultural group, or by encouraging groups of students to collaborate on academic and social projects over a period of time.

It may be helpful to include the above advice in formal guidelines for good practice produced at a university rather than just a departmental level, which can then be disseminated to all departments as well as being built into contracts with any external companies hired to provide catering facilities. Such guidelines could form one part of a general statement on equality and diversity in relation to religion and belief. This could also be made available to students via the Internet so any students who feel unable to participate know what to expect from departments and feel able to voice their concerns.

### Religion in the university: key choices

It is very difficult for a university to remain neutral and to treat everyone equally in this example because different activities and events will inevitably appeal to different people in any context. Whichever way university staff arrange social events they are unlikely to fit with everyone's wishes. This means that university leaders will have to make certain choices regarding what they provide for their students and the culture they wish to promote on campus. This may range from not moving from the status quo to attempting to reach out to a diverse constituency, perhaps by making efforts to provide social events that reflect a diverse array of ways of enjoying each other's company, relaxing and celebrating. These could even be formalised in specific parties or meals offered by members of religious traditions as an aspect of mutual hospitality. This latter choice will require different attitudes to religion and belief on campus—but will recognise that people socialise differently.

## Available resources

Guidance on religious taboos is offered in the Centre for Excellence in Leadership's guide *Faith Communities Toolkit for Leaders and Managers in the Learning and Skills Sector*. IFNUK's website also has a guide to catering for multifaith events which can be used as a guide at events:

[www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/UsersDoc/CEL%20Faith%20Communities%20Toolkit.pdf](http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/UsersDoc/CEL%20Faith%20Communities%20Toolkit.pdf)

[www.interfaith.org.uk/local/catering.htm](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/local/catering.htm)

The East of England Faiths Council has also produced a guide specific to that region called *Working and Consulting with Faith Communities in the East of England* which contains advice on running multifaith events:

[www.goeast.gov.uk/goeec/docs/186892/eefc\\_working\\_with.pdf](http://www.goeast.gov.uk/goeec/docs/186892/eefc_working_with.pdf)

Guidance on making provision for religious groups can be found in the ECU's report *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Facilities and Services*, which contains a number of university case studies:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-facilities](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-facilities)

Details about how students use university services, including some details about ethnic minority uptake of services, can be found in the in the *Student Experience Report* published by the NUS in 2008:

[www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/4017/NUS\\_StudentExperienceReport.pdf](http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/4017/NUS_StudentExperienceReport.pdf)

## 18

## Alcohol, bars and events

# Organisation of freshers' week

The E&D team at this university has over the last year been conducting an impact assessment, one of the aims of which is to highlight areas of the institution's work where issues could emerge in relation to religion and belief. Toward the end of the assessment one of the members of the team mentions that the planning for freshers' week may not have taken into account the diverse beliefs of the students at the university. Specifically, she comments that the week's programme is mainly driven by events involving alcohol. Although she does not think this problem can be considered under the heading of discrimination, she does worry that it may leave some students feeling isolated and unwelcome and, moreover, that it may have negative effects upon campus relations.



### Issues to consider

- What alternative or additional events should the students' union consider putting on, if any?
- Could and should the university consult with students to find out what they would like to see?
- How can freshers' week help set the tone aspired to by university leaders in terms of religious literacy?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

As the example indicates, it is unlikely that this example has any legal implications. The university may, however, choose to respond to the issue that the member of the E&D team raised above as part of an approach to equalities and diversity that goes beyond legal compliance to address religious diversity directly and to remove barriers to full participation in university life.

### Additional options

In order to make sure everyone's viewpoints are heard, the students' union may wish to consider giving the students the opportunity to give feedback at the end of freshers' week, providing them with the chance to offer their thoughts on how

the week has been run and events they would like to see in the future. The university could also consider bringing together a group of students' union and religious society representatives to discuss what the society members thought of the events. There is, however, a danger in this of privileging certain individuals; it may be best for the university to hear these views in the context of general feedback, rather than holding separate events to hear religious groups.

University leaders may choose to work with the students' union to ensure that the freshers' week timetable features a wide range of events, including those in which drinking alcohol does not play a significant role and perhaps some explicitly non-alcoholic social events. At least one students'

union (see the ECU report below) runs a regular non-alcoholic freshers' party that in the academic year 2008/09 was attended by well over 450 students, managing to make a profit which was then ring-fenced to spend on future non-alcoholic events. This can act as an example for other unions to build on. At the same time, the university will need to recognise that teetotalism and religious belief are not always aligned and striking a balance will be a matter of good judgement. Issues to do with alcohol may also extend to a religious disposition towards cultural modesty, including sexual modesty, and this may be a consideration too.

To provide for those students who do not feel that they can participate in more alcohol-orientated events, the students' union could consider working with the university's interfaith groups and with the chaplaincy to run one or more events where students from different faith groups can come together socially. It could create opportunities for religious groups to offer and share hospitality, to learn between and beyond their communities about food and other practices and to enrich experience. The university might, working with the students' union, provide opportunities for religious societies to organise social events—both during freshers' week and in normal term time—at which people can learn about their religious traditions. At one university in London, for example, the Sufi society holds an annual event at which there is traditional food, performances of the reed flute (*ney*) and displays of Sema, the devotional practice made famous by the dervishes of the Mawlawi Order. Universities may wish to use such events to create a more convivial atmosphere, and to allow the university's faith groups to build bridges between and beyond one another—although it would be helpful to try to provide opportunities for people of faith to socialise around their other identities too, rather than just catering for them with 'religious' as distinct from 'non-religious' events.

### Religion in the university: key choices

The central issue in this example is how in freshers' week university leaders help set the tone aspired to in terms of religious literacy. Key issues university leaders might wish to consider are whether the university should make dedicated efforts to respond to increasing religious diversity as part of an attempt to widen participation, or to attract and retain students from various backgrounds, including international students. It may be primarily the responsibility of students to organise events for new students to attend in the first weeks of the academic year, but universities may wish to play a role in encouraging the students' union to consider running a wide variety of events which cater for differences in attitudes throughout the year out of a commitment to inclusiveness in all areas of university life. In this way freshers' week can be linked into other areas of the university, with issues around the consumption of alcohol, the exercise of modesty and religious practices at particular times of day taken into account in the organisation of the ongoing social life of the campus.

## Available resources

Details of provision for different groups during freshers' week can be found in the ECU's report *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Facilities and Services*: [www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-facilities](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-facilities)

The East of England Faiths Council's guide *Working and Consulting With Faith Communities in the East of England* contains a guide for anyone organising a multifaith event: [www.goeast.gov.uk/goee/docs/186892/eefc\\_working\\_with.pdf](http://www.goeast.gov.uk/goee/docs/186892/eefc_working_with.pdf)

## 19

## Admissions and registry

# Attracting local students

A university is developing a new strategy for widening participation which is likely to involve making concerted efforts to increase the number of applicants from the local area, which it believes are too low at present. To achieve its goals, university leaders are planning to make regular visits to local sixth-form colleges and to establish a termly away day where sixth-form students can find out what a university environment is like. Within the city there are significant socio-economic disparities between the different ethnic and religious groups. In particular, the Sikh community in the north and the North African Muslim population in the west are not just less well off economically but are also, it has recently been shown, less likely to go into Further and Higher Education even when educational attainment and economic affluence are taken into account. This has caused some of the staff at the university's Centre for Community Engagement and Lifelong Learning to suspect that family norms and cultural background are playing a role in reducing the young people's aspirations. They resolve to make efforts to remedy this via an outreach programme, but are unsure how to strategise.



### Issues to consider

- What can the university do to find out more about the city's ethno-religious makeup?
- Should the university aim to engage with the faith communities in the area and what are the risks and opportunities of doing so?
- What ought university leaders do to ensure they make effective and broad contact?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

Government strategy in relation to widening participation can be separated from the law relating to E&D. Yet universities are expected to take steps to encourage a broad constituency of students—from a variety of class, ethnic and faith backgrounds—to apply to university. A university's ability to access hard to reach groups is now a key performance indicator.

### Additional options

Before deciding upon its response the university will need to develop an accurate picture of the religious communities in the local area. To do this they may wish to make contact with the local Regional Faith Forum and IFNUK, and/or make use of

information found in academic and policy sources (such as the Census). This will help build a reliable background picture about what factors are preventing some young people from applying to university.

Even if the university leaders choose not to approach religious communities directly they could still make efforts to address the under-representation of ethno-religious minorities during visits to local sixth-form colleges and termly away days. They could, for example, make a point of highlighting any provision that the university has made to accommodate people from different cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds, including prayer rooms and catering and accommodation

arrangements. By making people aware of the fact that the university is willing to take on board their particular needs and interests HEI leaders can ensure that both students and their families see HE as a viable option.

Alternatively, university leaders may conclude that the under-representation of certain groups in the city justifies a targeted response focusing on those groups in particular. This might involve targeting those schools that have large numbers of students from those backgrounds, or it could involve making contact with non-academic institutions that are frequented by members of those communities to advertise the university and recruit students and staff. There are also challenges for retention of students once they have been admitted and all of the religious literacy considerations universities might explore—for example in relation to food and accommodation—can be looked on as part of a drive to widen student participation.

### Religion in the university: key choices

Controversy often surrounds attempts by public institutions to engage with religious communities, and there can be difficulties involved in doing so. Obvious points of contact such as places of worship may be run by the older members of religious communities, who may reach a particular and limited constituency of people from their faith tradition. Some religious communities may also have internal hierarchies, and their places of worship may not be open to women. For those working in HE, this may mean that they do not provide the kind of access to the 'hard to reach' groups they are looking for. For university leaders less inclined to recognise religious identities these obstacles may mean they choose not to engage with religious groups and use alternative access points.

On the other hand, others may argue that an under-appreciation of people's religious and spiritual identities is part of the problem. Universities that take this view may wish to stress in their contact with prospective students the importance it places upon human growth as an educational goal and its openness to religious identity as an aspect of this. Such universities may endeavour to avoid the possible problems mentioned above by developing longer term links with trusted local religious institutions, both to ensure that students at the university have access to those facilities and also to reach as many people as possible with the message that applying or getting their children to apply to this university is worthwhile and welcome.

## Available resources

An outline of the government's widening participation strategy was published in 2008 by the ESRC. Information on the topic is also available via the HEFCE website:

[www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/HEcomm.pdf](http://www.tlrp.org/pub/documents/HEcomm.pdf)

[www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/widen/)

The Multifaith Centre at the University of Derby has produced a comprehensive guide to the different institutions and traditions in the UK entitled *Religions in the UK: A Multi-faith Directory*.

Details of organisations working to promote interfaith relations can be found in the IFNUK directory *Inter Faith Organisations in the UK: A Directory* (which is available in online form or in print):

[www.interfaith.org.uk/local/directory.htm](http://www.interfaith.org.uk/local/directory.htm)

Information about local faith organisations can be found via the local Regional Faith Forum:

[www.bsingh.biz/erffn/](http://www.bsingh.biz/erffn/)

The Centre for Excellence in Leadership has produced a guide entitled *Faith Communities Toolkit for Leaders and Managers in the Learning and Skills Sector* which contains an introduction to faiths in the UK and explains some of the benefits of developing links with them. The East of England Faiths Council has also produced a guide focused on that region called *Working and Consulting With Faith Communities in the East of England*:

[www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/UsersDoc/CEL%20Faith%20Communities%20Toolkit.pdf](http://www.centreforexcellence.org.uk/UsersDoc/CEL%20Faith%20Communities%20Toolkit.pdf)

[www.goeast.gov.uk/goee/docs/186892/eefc\\_working\\_with.pdf](http://www.goeast.gov.uk/goee/docs/186892/eefc_working_with.pdf)

## 20

## Admissions and registry

# Interview scheduling

A post for the position of lecturer was recently advertised at this university. Over 50 applications were received and 15 people were invited to an interview. The interviews were scheduled to be held over two days during November, but after the dates of the interviews were sent out to the applicants one of them contacted the human resources department to inform them that he would be unable to attend due to Diwali being celebrated that week. Two of the staff involved in setting up the interviews have suggested that the university ought to respond by saying that they cannot be rescheduled, and that the institution has a policy of not making special arrangements for religious groups due to its being a secular foundation. Other staff are wary of this response, but are tempted by it because they cannot see an easy way to rearrange the interviews.



### Issues to consider

- Is doing nothing a viable — or even a legal — option for the university?
- What other options are available?
- Are there any procedures and practices that could be followed that would allow the problem to be avoided in the future?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

Legally, a university is required to avoid all forms of indirect discrimination, which means any practice that, although applied to all, disadvantages a specific religious group. Only if a practice constitutes a genuine business need can it be justified legally. As in many traditions, not all Hindus attach the same degree of importance to the observance of festivals, yet as the individual in this example appears to attach significance to this festival it is unlikely that the university would be able to justify refusing to meet the candidate on another day. This would almost certainly be judged to constitute discrimination against the applicant if

the matter were to go to a court or tribunal, so the best option would be to reschedule.

### Additional options

In the above example, the uncertainty and differences of opinion indicate a lack of clear policy guidance in the area. To avoid this, the university may wish to ensure that its E&D officer, if the university has one, communicates best practice models to all the staff involved in staff recruitment, including details of what does and what does not constitute indirect discrimination.

Much of the difficulty in this case might have been avoided if those responsible for organising the interviews had been aware of the religious festivals that were taking place when the interviews were scheduled. To prevent the same problem occurring in future, the E&D team could take steps to ensure that all those involved in advertising for and interviewing new employees are made aware of resources that list significant religious festivals, and in particular faith calendars, that are available from a number of sources (see below).

Universities wishing to reach people from a wide variety of ethnic, religious and class backgrounds may wish to see this issue as one part of a much broader set of concerns relating to staff recruitment and retention. To prevent anyone being dissuaded from applying for a position because of their religious background a university may wish to reassure prospective applicants in early contact material that their religious needs will be accommodated wherever possible; that they are welcome to get in contact if there are timetable clashes; and that if they feel they have been treated unfairly for any reason their concerns will be taken seriously.

### Religion in the university: key choices

There is a clear minimum requirement for employers set out by law, but university leaders have the option of going beyond this. In addition to some or all of the options mentioned above, the staff at the university could develop a strategy for recruitment and retention of different religious groups that involves making potential applicants aware that the university is willing and able to provide information to new staff and students about their local religious communities, perhaps including in this case information about local temples, ashrams, Hindu societies, public festivals and any on-campus facilities. Taking these extra steps, though, requires the university to make significant decisions about how open it is to recognising and engaging with religious beliefs and identities and, in this case, how willing it is to find out about the character of local religious communities.

## Available resources

Details of a university's legal obligations in relation to religion and belief can be found in the ACAS guide *Religion and Belief in the Workplace: A Guide for Employers and Employees* and the ECU's guide *Employing People in Higher Education: Religion and Belief*:

[www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide\\_religionB\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/9/jj/guide_religionB_1.pdf)

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/employing-people-in-higher-education-religion-and-belief.pdf/view)

Specific advice about timetabling in HE is given in the ECU's briefing paper *Religious Observance in Higher Education: Institutional Timetabling and Work Patterns*:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-timetabling](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/religious-obs-timetabling)

The BBC website contains arguably the most comprehensive and up-to-date calendar of religious festivals:

[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/tools/calendar/)

Details of Hinduism can be found in the HEA's *A Guide to Hinduism*:

[www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith\\_guides.html](http://www.prs.heacademy.ac.uk/publications/faith_guides.html)

## 21

## Research

## Academic freedom and research on martyrdom

One of the lecturers in the Department of Social Science at this university teaches a postgraduate course on religious identity. The assessment for the course is a 5,000 word essay, the title of which can be decided by the students. One of the students in the class, an observant Muslim, asks the lecturer if he can focus on martyrdom, which he proposes would involve examining the writings on the topic in early Islamic and Christian texts and looking at how these differ from recent statements on martyrdom by religious extremists. While the lecturer thinks this could potentially be a valuable topic of study, she is concerned that research into current discourses on extremism and martyrdom could attract attention and possibly suspicion, and lead the student into some potentially dangerous and difficult situations and dilemmas. She has to give her consent to each of the essay titles but, aware of recent cases where students have been detained under the Terrorism Act, she does not know the best course of action to take in this case.



## Issues to consider

- Should the lecturer discuss the matter with any other university staff and, if so, which staff?
- How should she manage the relationship between herself and the student in question?
- More broadly, what policies should the university have in place to deal with such cases?

## Model responses

## Complying with the law

It is now an offence under the Terrorism Act (2006) to engage in: acts preparatory to terrorism; encouragement to terrorism (including the 'glorification' of terrorism); and dissemination of 'terrorist publications'. Government publications on this subject have suggested that universities ought to take steps to ensure that mechanisms are established to deal with unlawful speech; that clear policies about acceptable use of university facilities are developed, including Internet access; that procedures are put in place to ensure that any publications or literature being held or distributed on campus can be translated quickly into English; and that clear reporting mechanisms are set up for staff

and students to report concerns within the institution. Ideally, these measures should not obstruct legitimate research in any way. Indeed, freedom of academic inquiry is protected in law by the Education Reform Act (1988). Therefore as long as the lecturer is certain the research is being undertaken for good reasons there should be no further legal implications.

## Additional options

To try and minimise the confusion that conducting research on topics such as this could cause, university leaders may wish to consider revising the mechanisms dealing with sensitive research. Most university departments require their students

to go through a full ethical process before beginning research, and many require clearance to be given before any research on difficult topics—dealing with, for instance, young or vulnerable people—is undertaken. The university could include this topic on any list of sensitive subjects and set out guidelines for supervisors whose students wish to conduct research in this area. This might involve making sure that supervisors work particularly closely with the students on these subjects and inform the staff in the university who are responsible for responding to concerns about extremism and unlawful speech. This should help avoid any situations where suspicions are raised unnecessarily, and make sure any knee-jerk reactions are dealt with swiftly and without prejudice.

In addition to this, the lecturer could work with the student to make sure that he has made best use of any academic resources, including colleagues, who can advise on and support the research in terms of any risks it might pose. The lecturer and her colleagues could direct the student toward trusted academics and research centres that study this topic to minimise the risk of the research attracting attention and leading to difficult situations.

It is possible that the student's interest in this topic has been generated by the feeling that it has not been examined in depth, or that public conversation on this particular topic has not been informative or constructive. University leaders could therefore consider taking steps to ensure a positive conversation on such issues can take place on campus, possibly by creating spaces for students to discuss research that focuses on religion with a view to increasing understanding of religious beliefs and the differences of opinion and interpretation within them. It could also involve identifying opportunities for disseminating findings in ways that enrich the field and the culture of research in the university in relation to religious faith. By doing this, any wariness that surrounds the study of religious faith, and Islam specifically, may be challenged and a positive university culture generated.

### Religion in the university: key choices

The issue of academic freedom has become increasingly strained in recent years, with some organisations, such as the Universities and Colleges Union, arguing that recent legislation has undermined academic inquiry and that some subjects—including the study of some forms of Islam—are seen as 'too hot to handle'. Part of this may be linked to general suspicion of Islam—or even faith in general—rooted in a lack of familiarity with the tradition and uncertainty about some of its teachings. University leaders may wish to consider the possibility that a closed culture in relation to religion and belief could foster wariness toward students who take an interest in religious traditions, and potentially result in unnecessary feelings of distrust.

## Available resources

Government guidance on this subject can be found in the report by BIS, *Promoting Good Campus Relations, Fostering Shared Values and Preventing Violent Extremism in Universities and Higher Education Colleges*:

[www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedD/ec\\_group/22-07-HE\\_on](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedD/ec_group/22-07-HE_on)

Details of the relevant Acts can also be found in the updated ECU/UUK report, *Promoting Good Campus Relations: An Institutional Imperative*:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/promoting-good-campus-relations-update.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/promoting-good-campus-relations-update.pdf/view)

Details about Islamic studies departments in the UK, both within the university system and Islamic seminaries, can be found in Atallah Siddiqui's report *Islam at Universities in England: Meeting the Needs and Investing in the Future*. The HEA has also produced a report entitled *International Approaches to Islamic Studies in Higher Education for HEFCE* which may be of use to university leaders wishing to strategise in the area. HEFCE has also produced a similar report entitled *Islamic Studies: Trends and Profiles*:

[www.mihe.org.uk/mihe/upload/documents/siddiqui\\_report2007.pdf](http://www.mihe.org.uk/mihe/upload/documents/siddiqui_report2007.pdf)

[www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/RDreports/2008/rd07\\_08/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/RDreports/2008/rd07_08/)

[www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/HEFCE/2008/08\\_09/08\\_09.pdf](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/HEFCE/2008/08_09/08_09.pdf)

## 22

## Research

# Researching faith and sexuality

A postgraduate student at a university decides to conduct a number of discussion groups as part of his thesis on faith and sexuality at which both religious and non-religious people will be present. He plans for the discussion groups to be as open as possible, and contacts a variety of religious groups as well as people with no specific religious affiliation to ask them to participate. The first takes place in the university, with three undergraduate students taking part and six people coming from further afield. Initially the conversation proceeds smoothly, but as the participants warm up, serious differences begin to emerge. In particular, one of the students and a member of a local faith community get into a lengthy heated dispute about the moral status of same-sex relationships. The student finds this experience very distressing, and a few days later raises the issue with her senior tutor.



### Issues to consider

- What could the postgraduate student have done to avoid the problem?
- Are there any possible legal implications emerging from this incident?
- What are the relevant areas of university policy?

## Model responses

### Complying with the law

The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act (2008) created the offence of inciting hatred on the grounds of sexual orientation. As with recent legislation covering religious hatred, the Act does not make discussion or criticism of sexual orientation, conduct or practices, or urging people to refrain from or modify their sexual practices, illegal. But some forms of speech are now outlawed. In addition, unwanted conduct that violates a person's dignity or creates an intimidating, hostile, humiliating or offensive environment may constitute harassment according to the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003). (This Act also offers protections against discrimination in provision of goods or services on grounds of sexual orientation.) The participants in the group may have committed an offence according to one or more of these pieces of legislation, depending upon what was said. If the statements were serious enough—encouraging violence against people of a particular

sexual orientation, for example—the tutor may have reason to contact the police. Complaints of harassment are less serious, but a university that fails to protect its staff and students from incidences of harassment may nevertheless be held vicariously liable for the activities of their staff. To avoid such problems universities need to ensure they take reasonable steps to prevent harassment by implementing proper procedures and training.

### Additional options

Most research ethics frameworks make clear that harm to research participants must be avoided. Even if the law was not broken, this still was clearly a problem in this case. Many universities insist upon giving students clearance on a particular research topic before they engage in fieldwork. The university might in future want to make sure that it

takes into account these difficulties before giving research clearance. While the student in this case would not necessarily have been advised against looking at the topic, he might have been advised to consider safer ways of bringing people with such divergent views into close contact, possibly by choosing to interview the people in the study individually rather than in a group.

To help participants explore difficult topics like this one constructively, the university or department could make available general advice on how to facilitate positive conversations. This might involve advising students and staff conducting discussion groups, among other things: to create a welcoming physical space; to establish goals for the discussion; to check in and take stock at key intervals in the conversation, encouraging no-fault group-process feedback; and to deal openly with conversational potholes, pointing out where factioning is occurring and giving constructive feedback to those who shut down or marginalise others in discussion. Crucially, such advice should encourage those holding discussions to point out to participants that people of faith and gay people experience these identities as more than conceptual categories—they are lived and emotional realities too, and public debate and discourse must respectfully recognise this.

Prior awareness of ongoing debates around same-sex relationships within different religious traditions might help to create conversations in which participants do not feel as though they are being personally attacked. If the student in this case had been able to refer to a diversity of views, and keep the discussion focused on the differences within religious traditions rather than (even unintentionally) encouraging personal comments about an individual's behaviour, then the relationship between the participants may have been more respectful. Members of staff working in the department, or E&D staff who deal with the areas of religion and belief and sexuality, could collect together resources on the topic (such as the Stonewall report below) which could then be made available to any students who are planning on carrying out research in this area.

### Religion in the university: key choices

The need to safeguard freedom of expression and belief, while at the same time protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people from discrimination and harassment, has been the cause of a number of disputes in recent years. There is an obvious potential tension between protections for religion and belief and those for sexual orientation where religious beliefs are homophobic. It is an issue that is likely to recur in the future, with disagreements being resolved in many cases in court judgements, including Supreme Court cases. There are a number of contexts in HE where these issues may arise other than the situation discussed in this example. A religious student society which attempted to exclude gay members, for example, would present university leaders with a serious dilemma. Universities may benefit from assessing potential problems in advance of a crisis to ensure that they are able to negotiate competing interests in a clearly defined way.

For some staff working in HEIs, this kind of conflict may provide a justification for not engaging with religion and belief, with religious identity being kept as far as is possible within the private sphere to avoid problems. Indeed, for some this tension might be

reason enough to take a more aggressively secular stance which regards religious faith as a potentially disruptive influence. Alternatively, university leaders, particularly in institutions that view themselves as open to religious diversity, may see these tensions as a set of challenges to be overcome by facilitating dialogue, perhaps by holding events on the matter with invited speakers.

## Available resources

The ESRC Research Ethics Framework is the most popular guidance framework for conducting research in the social sciences:

[www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC\\_Re\\_Ethics\\_Frame\\_tcm6-11291.pdf](http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/Images/ESRC_Re_Ethics_Frame_tcm6-11291.pdf)

ACAS have produced a detailed and highly accessible guide to the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2003):

[www.uk-legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031661.htm](http://www.uk-legislation.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031661.htm)

[www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/e/n/sexual\\_1.pdf](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/e/n/sexual_1.pdf)

There is less available on the more recent Employment Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (2007) and Criminal Justice and Immigration Act (2008), but Communities and Local Government have drafted an impact assessment:

[http://195.99.1.70/si/si2007/uksi\\_20071263\\_en\\_1](http://195.99.1.70/si/si2007/uksi_20071263_en_1)

[www.uk-legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga\\_20080004\\_en\\_9](http://www.uk-legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2008/ukpga_20080004_en_9)

[www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/equalityimpactassessment.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/equalityimpactassessment.pdf)

Stonewall have written a research report on faith and sexuality entitled *Love Thy Neighbour* which takes a detailed look at this issue. They have also produced a more general attitude survey entitled *Living Together*:

[www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/love\\_thy\\_neighbour.pdf](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/love_thy_neighbour.pdf)

[www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/living\\_together.pdf](http://www.stonewall.org.uk/documents/living_together.pdf)

The ECU have produced a report called *Experience of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Staff and Students in Higher Education: Research Report*, which specifically relates to HE:

[www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/lgbt-staff-and-students-in-he-report.pdf/view](http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/files/lgbt-staff-and-students-in-he-report.pdf/view)

R J Nash et al's book *How to Talk About Hot Topics on Campus* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008) provides advice on talking about difficult subjects, and offers a number of practical tips for facilitating conversations (pp. 205-218).







Religious  
Literacy  
Leadership

In Higher Education

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