

# Religion and Belief Policy

## Introduction:

1. Bird College welcomes and celebrates the diversity of the religious beliefs (including non-belief) among our students and staff, which we believe contributes to the richness of College life. In line with our ethos, the College encourages and supports members of the community of all religions and beliefs in observing their religious practice, especially those which are considered obligatory. We are a secular institution with no religious or denominational affiliation. We are committed to providing a supportive and safe environment in which students and staff can engage successfully with all aspects of College life in a culture of mutual respect for everyone's religious beliefs or non-belief. This includes a commitment to eliminating discrimination on grounds of religion or belief, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering respect and good relations between groups, in accordance with the Equality and Diversity Policy Statement.
2. The College recognises that the spiritual and moral systems that religion or belief offer can be of fundamental importance to the well-being and success of students and staff. This policy, therefore, provides guidance to students and staff on how all our needs with respect to religion and belief are to be met. The policy does not intend to be comprehensive; rather it addresses some important questions that may arise in this context.

## Policy Scope

3. This policy covers all students & staff at Bird College. It relates to all aspects of their studies and work.

## Definitions

4. Section 10 of the Equality Act 2010 defines religion or belief as "any religion and any religious or philosophical belief. It also includes a lack of any such religion or belief".

Religion means any religion and includes a lack of religion. It refers to the more commonly recognised religions in the UK but a religion need not necessarily be mainstream or well-known to gain protection as a religion. However, it must have a clear structure and belief system.

Belief means any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Religious belief goes beyond beliefs about and adherence to a religion or its central articles of faith and may vary from person to person within the same religion. A belief need not include faith or worship of a God or Gods but must affect how a person lives their life or perceives the world.

A belief which is not a religious belief may be a philosophical belief. For a philosophical belief to be protected by the Equality Act:

- It must be genuinely held.
- It must be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on information available at the moment.
- It must be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour.
- It must attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion, and importance.
- It must be worthy of respect in a democratic society.
- It must be compatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others.

**Discrimination (Direct):**

Acts that specifically exclude or disadvantage individuals or groups by reference to their religion or belief.

**Discrimination (Indirect):**

Instances where discrimination occurs when an approach, practice, policy or system does not discriminate on the face of it (it seems to be a 'neutral rule' applied to everyone) but has the effect of causing disadvantage to one group or individual more than others due to their religion or belief.

**Discrimination (by perception or association):**

Discrimination that occurs because an individual is perceived as belonging to a religion or belief or is discriminated against because of their association with another person's religion or belief (for example, a spouse, parent, co-worker).

**Bullying:**

Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour involving the misuse of power that can make a person feel vulnerable, upset, humiliated, undermined or threatened. Power does not always mean being in a position of authority. It can include both personal strength and the power to coerce through fear or intimidation.

**Harassment:**

Any unwanted physical, verbal or non-verbal conduct that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them. A single incident can amount to harassment. A person may be harassed even if they were not the intended "target" of the harassing behaviour. Harassment is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010 if it relates to age, disability, gender reassignment, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation, or if it is conduct of a sexual nature (sexual harassment). The College considers all harassment to be unacceptable, whether or not it relates to a relevant protected characteristic.

**Hate Crime:**

Any criminal offence which is perceived by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by hostility or prejudice based on a person's race or perceived race; religion or perceived religion; sexual orientation or perceived sexual orientation; disability or perceived disability and any crime motivated by hostility or prejudice against a person who is transgender or perceived to be transgender.

**Antisemitism:**

A certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities.

**Islamophobia:**

A certain perception of Muslims, which may be expressed as hatred toward Muslims. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of Islamophobia are directed toward Muslim or non-Muslim individual and/or their property, toward Muslim community institutions and religious facilities. It should be noted that Islamophobia can be experienced by those who are racialised as Muslim despite not being of the faith.

**Atheism:**

An absence of belief in the existence of God or gods.

## **Legal Framework:**

As a Higher Education institution, there are several legal frameworks that must be adhered to in relation to religion and belief:

- Equality Act 2010, including the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- Human Rights Act 1998, notably Article 10: Freedom of Expression.
- Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006.
- Education Act 1986, notably Section 43 (2): Freedom of Speech in Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges.

In particular, the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty place a responsibility on the university to:

- Ensure facilities and services do not discriminate (whether that is direct, indirect or by association/perception) against people on the basis of religion, belief or non-belief.
- Advance equality, including fostering good relations between different groups.

5. In defining what is reasonable, Bird College seeks to balance the religion or belief needs of a student with the legitimate needs of the College, the requirements of the course and the interests of others. Wherever possible, the College will explore a flexible approach for students to facilitate faith practice. As some agreed flexibilities will take time to be arranged, both staff and students should allow a reasonable timeframe for these to be discussed and agreed.

6. To reach a fully considered, balanced, and reasonable conclusion, the College should consider, amongst other factors:

- the cost, disruption and wider impact on business or work if the request is accommodated
- whether there are health and safety implications for the proposed change
- the disadvantage to the affected student if the request is refused
- the impact of any change on other employees or students, including on those who have a different religion or belief, or no religion or belief

## **Academic Freedom and Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion**

7. Bird College is an academic institution that places high value on open and reasoned debate. The College recognises the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. These rights are absolute but manifestations of these beliefs are not. The right to manifest a belief may be qualified by the need to show respect for the differing worldviews, lifestyles and identities of others. The College has a responsibility to promote pluralism and respect and will seek to intervene in instances where manifestations of a belief constitute harassment or create conflict that goes beyond open and reasoned debate.

## **Timetabling:**

8. The College must ensure that timetables operate efficiently and effectively to deliver learning, teaching and assessment requirements within the available space and time. For these reasons, the timetable

cannot accommodate the diversity of religious observance requirements on site. The College understands that there may be certain occasions when a student may be absent due to religious observance. It is expected that this will not be a common or regular occurrence.

9. For the same reasons, the College is unable to agree to changes to students' timetables on the basis of religious observance.

#### **Assessments:**

10. As a secular organisation and given the need to ensure that the assessment system is fair to all students, religious observance cannot be considered as grounds for extenuating circumstances with regard to either submission of coursework or attendance at assessments.

#### **Gender Segregation and Study:**

11. The curriculum includes some gender segregation in learning and teaching activities, specifically in preparation for movement and dance performances. The College also recognises that there are exceptions such as positive action schemes which are specifically designed to address inequalities.

#### **Religious Clothing and Study:**

12. The College welcomes the diversity of different attire worn by its students. In particular situations some students will not be able to wear certain religious clothing due to health and safety considerations and/or to the need for communication between individuals. The need to comply with health and safety regulations will be given priority over the need for religious expression. Any religious attire or accoutrements must be compliant with English law. Students should review the uniform requirements which provided guidance on inclusive dress.
13. In the interests of safety and security, students are required to have a College issued photographic ID and to produce it when required for identification purposes. The photo ID must show the student's face with any facial covering removed.
14. The College requires proof of identity for all students entering the College. This is done by carrying out a visual check against photographic ID issued by the College. In order to verify the identity of individual female students with a facial covering, the College will endeavour as far as reasonably possible to make available a female member of staff to perform this check in a private area.

#### **Student Environment:**

15. The College does not own student accommodation. Students are directed towards approved and trusted accommodation services in the area, mainly host families, private rentals and student-designed accommodation. Students, or if under 16 their parents/guardians, vet and select the accommodation that best suits their requirements.
16. A limited amount of University of Greenwich owned student accommodation is available to Bird College students particularly those in their first year. The University accommodation offers shared kitchens with adequate facilities for specific dietary needs and food preparation. The University does not have designated single sex flats. Students self-select their accommodation and will be able to view the gender of other students booked into available flats. Some flats may be single sex accommodation by default, but it cannot be guaranteed that this position will remain the same across the academic year should vacancies become available. Accommodation Services staff can offer advice and support to students before and after taking up residence about their housing options and any concerns students may have pertaining to the accommodation.

17. Bird College does have a dedicated reflection and contemplation space in the production block next to the counselling room. Students and staff can request to book this space through the timetabling team, if they wish to pray or engage in quiet reflection or meditation.
18. Food and drink: Bird College catering vendor sells a variety of food options including gluten free, vegetarian and vegan options. Events organised by Bird College will have vegetarian options when food is provided. Some events serve alcohol but there will always be non-alcoholic drinks provided. To enable students to make informed decisions about what they eat, food should be labelled clearly to indicate where it may be suitable for special dietary needs, including whether it has been prepared in accordance with any specific religious requirements. During preparation and storage meat should be kept separate from vegetarian food. Any food which is intended to meet religious requirements should be prepared and stored in accordance with those requirements.

**Prayer, worship and religious observance:**

19. In line with our inclusive ethos, the College encourages and supports members of all religions and beliefs in observing their religious practice, especially those which are considered obligatory. The College is consulting on the creation of a 'reflection room', which if agreed, will be fully functional in early 2023.
20. For both teaching and non-teaching staff, employees who require time off for religious or cultural observance will be entitled to request flexibility in the arrangement of shifts, rotas and working hours. Managers or Heads of Department should consider requests on these grounds and try to accommodate them wherever it is reasonably practicable to do so, subject to the needs of the College. HoD have a responsibility to positively engage with, acknowledge and enable participation in religious convictions, beliefs, or practices where it is important to individuals. Where operationally possible, Management should avoid organising important meetings, events or routine meetings on Fridays to allow flexibility for Jews observing Shabbat (flexibility may be needed on Friday afternoons, particularly in autumn and winter, to travel home by sunset) or Muslims wishing to take extended lunch breaks to attend the Jummah Friday prayers (13:00-14:00).
21. The College understands that the dates of the Islamic holy month of Ramadan may overlap with some assessment periods. Staff should consider how they can support students during this period to enable them to meet their learning and assessment requirements while maintaining their religious Religion and Belief Policy

**Dietary requirements:**

22. Dietary requirements should be considered for any events or meetings with catering, for example by making vegetarian and vegan food is widely available and gluten free, halal, kosher and other dietary requirements are accommodated wherever possible. Event organisers should also ensure non-alcoholic drinks are available and they should also consider the types of events being held to ensure a reasonable mix of functions with and without alcohol as some members of the College community may not be able to attend events or venues where alcohol is served. Members of the College community should also be aware that some staff and students may require separate utensils or separate places to store and heat their food. All members of the College community should be respectful of this and help provide mutually acceptable solutions where this is required.

**Staff recruitment:**

23. The College is committed to ensuring our recruitment practices are inclusive and provide equality of opportunity for all applicants, including those with a religion or belief, in line with our duties under the Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty. Staff carrying out recruitment should consider how they can make job adverts and recruitment information inclusive of a range of religions and beliefs, for

example by linking to relevant policies and facilities. They should also consider the religious needs of any interviewees when on site, for example, the location and availability of prayer spaces, places of worship and catering requirements. The timings of interviews should also be considered and wherever possible key religious dates and days of rest for different religions should be avoided.

#### **Discrimination on the grounds of Religion or Belief:**

24. The College will take firm action where anyone uses language, treatment or behaviour which discriminates against any other person on the grounds of their religion, belief or lack of religion or belief. Students should first speak to their Personal Tutor and may wish to have their complaint formally dealt with through the Student Disciplinary Procedure or the Bullying and Harassment Policy as appropriate. Disclosure can also be made via the Colleges disclosure form which is handled by the Principal and Equity and Inclusion Officer.

25. Religion, belief or lack of religion or belief will not be used to justify discriminatory or otherwise inappropriate or unlawful behaviour which may be in contravention of the College's expected standards of conduct. Instances of this will be dealt with through the Student Disciplinary Procedure or the Bullying and Harassment Policy as appropriate.

26. If a hate crime based on, or perceived to be based on, someone's religion or belief is experienced or witnessed, emergency help should be sought via the Police. Harassment related to the protected characteristics, which include religion and belief, is unlawful. Harassment on the grounds of religion or belief may include, but not limited to:

- Jokes about a particular religious group
- Behaviour which fails to tolerate, acknowledge or allow participation in religious convictions, beliefs or practices.
- Intrusive questions about a person's religion or beliefs.

#### **Implementation, Review and Monitoring:**

27. The Policy is implemented through student and staff training, and awareness raising events

28. The use and effectiveness of the Policy will be reviewed on an annual basis.

29. This Policy is to be reviewed every two years or sooner as required.

30. Equal opportunity data captures data on protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010, including religion and belief. The College collects equality data, including religion and belief, through HR and application services. This data is an important tool in monitoring the diversity of the College's students and staff and ensuring processes and systems are promoting equity of opportunity.

#### **Linked Policies:**

- Equality and Diversity Policy
- Anti-Racism Policy
- Bullying and Harassment Policy and Procedures (Students)
- Accommodation Pack
- Student Disciplinary Procedure
- Fitness to Study Policy and Procedure

## Reporting:

Bird College Equity and Inclusion Disclosure Form offers staff, students and visitors a means of reporting concerns. This form should be used by Bird College staff, students, and visitors to submit a disclosure about an incident(s) of harassment, discrimination, violence or abuse pertaining to any of the 9 Protected Characteristics detailed in the Equality Act 2010.

The form can be found at the following link:

<https://forms.office.com/r/CHtdTYi2iW>

Should you have any questions, please contact the Equity and Inclusion Officer or refer to the Equality and diversity Policy: [Stella.odusola@birdcollege.co.uk](mailto:Stella.odusola@birdcollege.co.uk)

This statement relates to:

- all members of the senior leadership team, including Trustees and Directors
- all staff, including members of the executive group
- all students
- all contractors, partners and third-party providers
- all visitors, volunteers and Alumni

## Document Control:

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