

Bristol Old Vic Theatre School Inclusivity Policy and Protocols: Religious Belief and Religious Observance

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The Policy

1. About the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School Inclusivity Policy & Protocols

1.1 The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School's Inclusivity Policy and Protocols is designed to embed and support an inclusive environment for all members of the School, from staff to students and beyond. There are several sections to the Inclusivity Policy and Protocols, including:

- Allyship & Being an Active Bystander
- Bereavement Support
- Disabilities
- Gender Identity
- Health and Wellbeing
- Religious Belief and Religious Observance
- Sexuality and Sexual Orientation
- Tackling Racial Inequality

2. About this section of the Inclusivity Policy and Protocols: Religious Belief and Religious Observance

2.1 The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School is committed to ensuring the inclusion of students from all faiths and none. This section of the Policy and Protocols is intended to support and facilitate a student's ability to engage positively and fully with their course of study and to fulfil the expectations of the training and course, regardless of religious belief or observance. It also aims to support and facilitate the experience of current and prospective staff of the School.

3. Context and terminology

3.1 For the purposes of this policy, religion and belief will be defined as they are in the Equality Act 2010. In this legislation:

3.1.1 Religion means any religion, including lack of religion.

3.1.2 Belief means any religious or philosophical belief, including lack of belief

3.2 This policy therefore references various types of religiously motivated discriminations such as islamophobia and antisemitism. Political beliefs are not included in this policy.

4. Purpose of the Policy: Scope and Principles

4.1 This policy applies to students studying on a course of Higher Education who are registered students at the School. This policy also applies to staff employed by the School, particularly those who manage staff or support or teach students.

4.2 While the aim of the Policy and Protocols is to be inclusive, this section is particularly relevant to religious belief and religious observance. This policy covers only those aspects of religious observance directly related to learning, teaching, assessment, and employment at the School.

4.3 Whatever the individual circumstances, the School is committed to being flexible, supportive, and making clear that discrimination and harassment on the ground of religious belief will not be tolerated.

- 4.4 The School is a secular institution that is committed to diversity. It recognises that it operates in a multi-cultural and multi-faith environment and that it responds to the increasing breadth of awareness needed to ensure an inclusive community where potential discrimination and misunderstandings are avoided.

5. Legislative Context

- 5.1 There are four pieces of legislation that are relevant to religion and religious observance in a Higher Education setting:

- Equality Act 2010
- Data Protection Act 2018 (UK)
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) (UK) 2018
- Human Rights Act 1998

5.2 Equality Act 2010

- 5.2.1 Religion and belief are listed under the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act. This prohibits discrimination and victimisation against a person on grounds of religion, belief, and non-belief.
- 5.2.2 Public bodies are required to integrate consideration of equality and good relations into their day-to-day business and to consider how a function can affect different groups in different ways. This enables a higher education provider to reasonably anticipate the needs of all staff, students, and visitors and to address the potential impacts of any proposed changes to ensure they do not have an adverse effect.

5.3 Data Protection Act 2018 (UK) and General Data Protection Regulations 2018 (UK)

- 5.3.1 The Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) complements the EU's General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR) and adds provisions specific to the UK. It has brought stricter rules and tighter controls on personal data. Information about a person's religious belief is considered 'special category data' under the Data Protection Act 2018. This data is subject to tighter controls than other personal data. Explicit consent is required before it can be collected, used, and shared.
- 5.3.2 Personal data must be looked after properly following the seven data protection principles, which include ensuring personal data is accurate, secure, and processed fairly and lawfully.
- 5.3.3 Under the DPA and GDPR, 'special category data' is afforded an extra level of confidentiality and will nearly always require explicit consent from the individual concerned prior to disclosure to another party. The School also has a responsibility under the DPA and GDPR to ensure that personal information is accurate and up to date, so it is important that the School holds a correct title and name.

5.4 Human Rights Act (1998)

- 5.4.1 Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights, as enacted under the Human Rights Act 1998, protects a person's rights to freedom of thought, belief, and religion. This can include a person's right to change their religion or belief at any time.
- 5.4.2 This article also protects the right to put thought and belief into action by, for example, wearing religious clothing, talking about your belief, and taking part in religious worship. It also

protects a wide range of non-religious beliefs such as atheism, pacifism, and veganism. Any belief that is serious, concerns important aspects of human life or behaviour, is sincerely held, and worth of respect in a democratic society is protected under this article.

6. Protection Against Harassment and Bullying

- 6.1 All staff, students and other stakeholders should expect to be treated with respect at all times. All complaints of harassment or bullying will be treated seriously and thoroughly investigated. Disciplinary action can be taken in cases where bullying/harassment have been proved.
- 6.2 Any act of harassment or bullying toward a person based on their religion, belief or non-belief will normally, in first instances, be dealt with under [UWE's Policy for Bullying and Harassment of or by Students](#)

The Protocols

Protocol Aim	Protocol	How this might be achieved	Supporting guidance and information
Respecting Religious Observance in the School Community	Clothing and other worn items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make every effort to address issues where religion and belief come into play (for example, modesty of dress or wearing a religious symbol) and reach a mutually acceptable solution on a case-by-case basis. • Consider flexibility when specifying class dress code. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is form-fitting clothing truly necessary for the context? ○ Can students train in longer sleeves/ trousers? • Consider holding training and/or awareness campaigns on the breadth and variety of religious and cultural self-presentation. 	<p>The School respects each student’s and staff member’s right to wear lawful items arising from cultural and religious norms (including, for example, sari, turbans, hats, skullcaps, hijab, kippah, mangal sutra, crucifix, crosses and clerical collars). Students and staff will not be asked to wear anything which makes them feel uncomfortable for religious or other reasons.</p> <p>However, there may be occasions in the performing arts when a person is expected to remove such items. These occasions may include but are not restricted to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health and safety • Ease of movement • Enactment of a role • Tradition and custom of a particular art form <p>There is also likely to be little room for adaptation in the costume/clothing required in performing certain roles in an acting, circus or dance performance.</p> <p>It is important that everyone in the School community recognises that there will be great variety in the way that any member of any faith wishes to present themselves. Even within the same faith, ‘religious dress’ will vary widely by denomination, gender, age, cultural or national background and personal preference.</p>

Respecting Religious Observance in the School Community	Dietary Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a simple standardised form to capture dietary requirements for all events. This should be sensitive to religious and culture dietary requirements (i.e., Halal, kosher); personal and ethnical requirements (i.e., veganism); and allergies and intolerances. • Where alcohol is to be served, support and highlight the provision of a variety non-alcoholic refreshments at events. • When organising field trips, consider the dietary requirements of the participants. 	<p>Some religions and belief systems have dietary requirements. When holding learning activities where refreshments are offered, institutions should take into account meeting the dietary requirements of those invited to attend wherever possible.</p> <p>Where the School is unable to accommodate a person’s dietary requirements for learning activities, the School should notify them in advance to allow sufficient time for the person to make their own arrangements.</p> <p>The School cannot guarantee that placements will be able to accommodate dietary restrictions. Where this is the case, the School should ensure the student has this information ahead of time. Students with special dietary requirements must be prepared to make their own arrangements with regards to food when on placements. Placements will not be changed because of an individual’s dietary requirements</p>
Respecting Religious Observance: Students	Application and Audition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the religious or cultural needs of any applicants whilst on site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure the audition panel is aware of, and inclusive of, a variety of dress; ○ If ID checks are required, consider how this can be done sensitively, for example, conducting these in private, or by a person the interviewee is most comfortable with. ○ Be flexible when scheduling interviews to accommodate religious days of rest and celebration. This will benefit a variety of interviewees, such as those with caring responsibilities or disabilities. 	<p>The School welcomes all applicants, regardless of their religion and belief. The School will always aim to be as inclusive and flexible as possible so as to not create artificial barriers within the institution.</p>

Respecting Religious Observance: Students	Prayer, Contemplation, and Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitively consider all requests for to take time away from training for religious observance. • Be flexible in allowing students to arrive slightly late to or leave slightly early from class. • Provide practical advice and support for students who are fasting to assist them in staying healthy during training or examinations. • It is recommend that all reasonable adjustments made to accommodate religious observance be managed under UWE’s Fitness to Study policy. 	<p>The School has a busy timetable which has been designed to ensure that teaching and learning requirements are delivered efficiently and effectively within the available time and space. For these reasons, there is often little, if any room for the timetable to accommodate the diversity of religious observance requirements. For example, the normal teaching day runs from 8.30am to 5.30pm from Monday to Friday. Weekend and evening attendance can also be a necessary part of the rehearsal schedule.</p> <p>However, the School recognises that there will be times when students want or need to take time out from academic study and training for a variety of reasons including religious observance and will endeavour to ensure that the manner in which these requests are responded to is consistent with the response to requests for absence on other grounds.</p> <p>The Principal and CEO of the School will have the authority to agree to these requests but may limit the number or regularity of absences when there are defensible pedagogic reasons.</p>
	Assessments, deadlines, and taught sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that those with responsibility for decision-making around timetabling and scheduling are trained and aware of the most common challenges around timetabling and faith. • Consider developing a shared calendar of major religious festivals, celebrations, ceremonies to facilitate scheduling of assessments. 	<p>The School will make every reasonable effort to avoid timetabling assessments or other compulsory activities on major religious festivals. It is best practice to involve students early in scheduling possesses. However, students should be made aware that there may be occasions on which this is not possible to avoid certain days.</p> <p>Students should inform the School far in advance if religious observance affects their ability to participate fully in any assessment so that reasonable adjustments can be made</p>

Respecting Religious Observance: Students	Assessments, deadlines, and taught sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicise as far in advance as possible important dates: i.e. examinations, coursework deadlines, rehearsal schedules. • Where appropriate, make sure of reasonable adjustments on the grounds of religious observance: i.e., rescheduling a performance examination outside of fasting hours/times. 	<p>where possible. If religious observance affects a student's ability to participate fully in any learning activity, it is the student's responsibility to catch up on any material missed.</p> <p>It is best practice for the School to keep a record of all student requests for religious accommodations to be made. This record should include the following information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student's course; • The student's religion or belief • The nature of the accommodation requested • If and how the accommodation was made and the objective justification for not being able to do so
Respecting Religious Observance: Staff	Application and Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the religious or cultural needs of any interviewees whilst on site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ensure interviewers are aware of, and inclusive of, a variety of dress; ○ If ID checks are required, consider how this can be done sensitively, for example, conducting these in private, or by a person the interviewee is most comfortable with. ○ Be flexible when scheduling interviews to accommodate religious days of rest and celebration. This will benefit a variety of interviewees, such as those with caring responsibilities or disabilities. ○ 	<p>The School welcomes employment applications from applicants from all faiths and none. The School will always aim to be as inclusive and flexible as possible so as to not create artificial barriers within the institution.</p> <p>It is best practice to ask all visitors if they have any specific needs or requirements when visiting our sites. This can include dietary requirements as well as the needs for a prayer room or similar contemplative space (particularly for all day sessions).</p>
	Prayer, Contemplation, and Worship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where possible and appropriate, managers should agree flexible working arrangements with members of staff who wish to pray or worship during the working day or who wish to alter their working 	<p>All staff of the School are required to work in accordance with their contract. The School, however, will always be sympathetic toward staff members who request to pray or worship during the working day or who request to alter their working patterns for religious reasons, an attempt</p>

Respecting Religious Observance: Staff	Prayer, Contemplation, and Worship	<p>pattern for religious reasons whilst continuing to fulfil the obligations of their contract.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Consider a review of HR procedures to ensure there is a clear, fair, and transparent process for such requests. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Consider developing a shared calendar of major religious festivals, celebrations, ceremonies to facilitate scheduling of important duties. 	<p>to accommodate such requests although this will not always be possible.</p> <p>School staff may request to use their annual leave entitlement to participate in religious festivals, celebrations, or ceremonies.</p> <p>If a staff member requests extended leave at a particular time for the purpose of, for example, going on a pilgrimage, the manager should consider the request sympathetically. If any such extended leave exceeding the annual holiday entitlement is granted, the excess days should be taken as unpaid leave.</p>
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Additional Resources

[Acas guide to religion and belief discrimination – key points for the workplace](#)

[Advance HE – Religion and Belief guidance and research](#)

[BBC A-Z of religions](#)

[Employment Equality \(Religion or Belief\) Regulations 2003 \(2003\) London: HMSO](#)

[Interfaith calendar](#)

[Inter Faith Network for the UK](#)