



Religious and Cultural Observance Statement

Authors: Mr Peter Wilson / Sharan Virdee
Approved By: PME
Date: 23 April 2009
Version: 1.0

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Heriot-Watt University

Religious and Cultural Observance Statement

Heriot-Watt University (HWU) is made up of a broad community of students, staff and visitors spread across 4 campuses - 3 in Scotland and 1 in Dubai. As an international university, we greatly value this diversity. HWU respects religious and cultural diversity and aims to support individuals in their religious and cultural observance, where academic aspects and business priorities permit.

HWU operates a semester structure per academic session. Students and staff choose HWU on the understanding that these semesters run in 12 week blocks followed by assessment weeks. Scheduled breaks follow each semester. Classes are scheduled to fit in with the examination timetable and to allow preparation time for examinations. Within this timetable, the University reserves the right to schedule classes and hold examinations on any days and times as meet with the core academic requirements of the University.

Guidance

Students

- Students wishing to participate in significant religious or cultural events must contact their student mentor where there are programme clashes or an impact on their class/examination schedule.
- The decision to sanction absence is at the discretion of student mentors in consultation with the Course Director if an event clashes with programme requirements.
- As assessments/examinations are core elements of academic courses, it will not normally be possible for students to absent themselves from assessments/examinations for religious or cultural reasons.
- **It is the responsibility of all students to ensure that the academic requirements of their courses are fulfilled.**

Student Mentors

- Where a student requests absence on the ground of religious or cultural observance, the student mentor should, in consultation with the Course Director, consider whether the absence would result in a detrimental affect on course requirements and advise the student accordingly.

Staff

- All members of staff are required to work in accordance with their contracts. The decision to sanction staff absence is at the discretion of line managers if a request for absence for religious or cultural observance clashes with contractual requirements. Line managers should recommend that members of staff make use of annual leave entitlements if work commitments allow. Staff should ensure that they give reasonable notice of any leave dates or commitments in order for requests to be reasonably considered and approved.

EIA Form

Heriot-Watt University: Equality Impact Assessment Form										
School	HWU Wide	Area	Academic Registry/ Human Resources	Person responsible for the assessment	Sharan Virdee	Date of EIA			Process began 12 November 2008	
Name of the Policy/Process to be assessed			Religious and Cultural Observance Statement		Is this a new or existing policy?	NEW	EXISTING	Does the policy impact on people?	Y	N*
1. Briefly describe the aims, objectives and purpose of the policy			The Statement provides an outline of how the University responds to the business needs of the institution along with the Religious and Cultural needs of University staff and students.							
2. Are there any associated objectives of the policy, please explain			To ensure that HWU has clear guidelines and workable policies and procedures to enable staff and students to work and study in a cohesive environment.							
3. Who is intended to benefit from the policy and in what way?			All staff and students							
4. Is any data available about the policy, e.g. feedback from users?			There is no statistical data on the subject area. However HWU has a sizable proportion of students and staff of differing faiths. The Chaplaincy takes a lead role in linking with a range of students and staff and the University makes considerable provision for Muslim staff and students on campus (Riccarton).							
5. What outcomes are wanted from this policy?			To ensure an understanding that the core requirements of both employment and study at Heriot-Watt University are paramount and that existing policies and procedures provide the basis for accommodating religious and cultural observance.							
6. What factors/forces could contribute/detract from the outcomes?			Line managers, student mentors and course leaders should be made aware of the statement to enable wide spread knowledge of the University's position on religious and cultural observance.							
7. In which equality areas are there concerns that the policy could have a differential impact? (If no go to question 8. If yes please circle then continue to question 9)			Race	Gender	Disability	Age	Sexual Orientation			
			Religion and Belief	Caring Responsibilities	Transgendered or Transsexual	NO Go to question 8				

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POLICY

8. If you answered 'No' to question 7, give details of how you reached your decision. Answer N/A to remaining questions and circle 'No' to question 15.	N/A			
9. If you circled responses to question 7, what concerns are there that the policy could have a differential impact on relevant groups? What existing evidence (either presumed or otherwise) do you have for this Please explain (continue on the separate Question 9* table if necessary)	HWU operates a semester structure per academic session running in 12 week blocks followed by assessment weeks. Scheduled breaks follow each semester. Classes are scheduled to fit in with the examination timetable and to allow preparation time for examinations. Scheduled vacations take place during tradition UK holiday periods covering Christmas, Easter and the summer Within this tight timetable it is possible that members of the University community who do not observe major UK holiday periods could be disadvantaged. However, Students and staff choose HWU on the understanding that these semesters and holiday periods are part of the working arrangements for the University and acknowledge that the University reserves the right to schedule classes and hold examinations on any days and times as meet with the core academic requirements of the University.			
10. Demonstrate how you have involved stakeholders in the EIA	The Religious and Cultural Belief Statement was put together jointly with the Academic Registry, Human Resources and the Equality & Diversity Advisor. The Equal Opportunities Committee were involved in shaping the statement and members of religious groups across the campus were consulted on the Statement's content. Other HEIs also contacted for input.			
11. What are the risks associated with the policy in relation to differential impact?	It is possible that at times of high workload (staff) and assessment/exam periods (students) HWU may not be able to offer flexibility for staff or students to observe religious or cultural practices.			
12. Could the differential impact identified in 6-11 amount to there being the potential for adverse impact in this policy? If no, outline why and go to question 14	YES	NO	Please Explain	See 11.
13. Can this adverse impact be justified on the grounds of promoting equality of opportunity for one group? Or any other reason	YES	NO	Please Explain	See 9.
14. Date EIA Completed	26 February 2009		15. Date fore future review of policy/function	3 years following formal adoption by HWU

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