



# Religious Observance Policy and Guidance



**Scope:** Taught programmes leading to an award of City St George's, University of London.

## **Senate Regulations**

Senate Regulation 19 Assessment Regulations

## **Summary**

The purpose of this policy is to set out arrangements for how examinations and assessments will be organised and made accessible to students on taught undergraduate and postgraduate programmes where a request for consideration of alternative arrangements for religious requirement observance is made.

This Policy will apply to partnership provision unless specific alternative arrangements have been agreed between the University and the partner institution and included in the Memorandum of Agreement for the partnership and student handbooks.

**Date approved/re-approved:** July 2023

**Date for review:** 2026

**Effective from:** August 2023

## **Equality and Diversity Statement**

City St George's, University of London is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion in all its activities, processes, and culture, under its Public Sector Equality Duties and the Equality Act 2010. This includes promoting equality and diversity for all, irrespective of any protected characteristic, working pattern, family circumstance, socio-economic background, political belief or other irrelevant distinction.

Where relevant to the policy, decision-making panels should normally aim to reflect gender diversity and to consider representation across protected characteristics. Panel membership will be based on relevant expertise and independence, and the panel may proceed where such diversity is not practicably achievable for a particular meeting. This clause does not impose fixed quotas and is inclusive of all gender identities.

## **Freedom of Speech**

City St George's, University of London, regards freedom of speech and academic freedom to be fundamental to delivering its mission as the University of business, practice and the professions. Its values in this respect are set out in a code of practice on freedom of speech and academic freedom, which explains how the University will uphold, secure, and promote Freedom of Speech within the law. Nothing in this policy should be interpreted in any way that would be inconsistent with the code of practice and in the event of any inconsistency the provisions of the code will prevail.

## Introduction

1. City St George's, University of London is enriched by embracing a diverse population of students and staff of different religions, religious beliefs or absence thereof. It acknowledges the desire and right of students to observe their own religion. The University aims to facilitate this, where it is reasonable and practical to do so, while remaining committed to academic standards and the delivery of high-quality teaching, learning and research.
2. City St George's, University of London is institutionally non-religious and does not endorse any particular denomination or faith. We recognise that students, staff and visitors may hold religious or spiritual beliefs and practices, and we support their ability to observe them and to express related views in a climate of tolerance and courtesy, consistent with UK law and the rights of others.
3. The University's Student Engagement & Attendance Policy states that students are expected to attend all classes and assessments as required by their programme.
4. The University's academic calendar is built around national public holidays. As far as is possible, the academic timetable and examinations calendar will be scheduled to avoid important religious festivals. However, the academic timetable and exams calendar cannot accommodate all the diversity of religious observance which all members of our community may wish to undertake.
5. The purpose of this policy is to set out arrangements for how teaching and learning activities, examinations and assessments will be organised and made accessible to students, where a request for consideration of alternative arrangements for religious requirement observance is made.
6. This policy covers religion and belief as defined in section 10 of the Equality Act 2010, including non-belief. Legislation relating to equality in the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Equality Act 2010 prohibits discrimination, harassment and victimisation against a person on grounds of religion, belief or non-belief. It also requires public authorities, such as City St George's, University of London, to have due regard to eliminating prohibited conduct, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations when exercising their functions. These duties are carried out alongside the University's responsibility to secure lawful freedom of speech and academic freedom: robust discussion and the expression of views about religion or belief (including views that some may find challenging or offensive) are permitted where they do not amount to unlawful conduct.
7. This Policy should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Taught Student Attendance and Engagement Policy
  - Extenuating Circumstances Policy
  - Interruption of Studies and Withdrawal Policy
8. Please note that the Religious Observance Policy may not apply to specific programmes or modules which have alternative Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements. The PSRB may provide its own policy. Students on those programmes should check with their Course Officer.
9. In this policy, “you” or “your” refers to the student; “we”, “us” and “ours” refers to City St George’s, University of London.

### **General Principles**

10. The following principles underpin our approach to Religious Observance in relation to teaching, assessments and examinations:
- a. A focus on providing support and enabling speedy resolution.
  - b. Recognition that our students are preparing for business and the professions (including careers in many sectors) and supporting them to progress and succeed.
  - c. Clarity in language and process.
  - d. Upholding fairness, consistency and natural justice in the treatment of the student body as a whole, as well as for particular individuals including by:
    - i. considering application requests for alternative arrangements without reference to, or sight of, individual marks;
    - ii. ensuring decisions regarding alternative arrangement requests for teaching, examinations and assessments are taken by those without conflicts of interest;
    - iii. ensuring that students are neither disadvantaged nor advantaged when compared to their peers as a result of the alternative arrangements.
  - e. Upholding impartiality in decisions and the integrity of academic judgement when making decisions about requests for alternative arrangements for examinations or assessment.
  - f. Maintaining awareness of the opportunity to apply for alternative arrangements for examinations and assessments through collaboration with student support services, the Students’ Union and the Chaplaincy.
  - g. Ensuring that visible and accessible central student support services and information are highlighted and made available to students at relevant key points in the academic year.
  - h. Ensuring appropriate levels of confidentiality and protection of sensitive and personal data including seeking relevant permission are maintained, as appropriate, to enable effective and necessary information sharing.

- i. Effective record keeping of applications by staff.
- j. A culture of enhancement for the University as we learn from requests for alternative arrangements based on religious observance and improve the student experience including through appropriate training for decision makers under this policy at the University.

## **Scope**

11. This policy covers those aspects of religious observance that students can inform the University of in advance of their teaching activities, assessments and examinations. These may include, but are not limited to:
  - a. Religious observance such as festivals, events and other religious days within a defined period
  - b. Other practices or observance required at a specific date(s) or time(s)
12. Unforeseeable or unpreventable events (such as where particular religious observance is required when the death of a close relative occurs and when specified forms of mourning are required) should be handled under the arrangements for considering Extenuating Circumstances. The Extenuating Circumstances Policy can also be used in cases where a student's welfare is impacted as a result of activities undertaken due to religious observance (e.g. fainting during an examination as a result of fasting) and have a detrimental effect on a student's performance during an examination.
13. Religious observance that is not required at a specific date(s) or time(s) should be managed around your studies.
14. Where it is deemed appropriate to do so, cases of religious observance may also be dealt with under the Interruption of Studies & Withdrawal Policy.

## **Teaching & Learning Activities Process**

15. Students should check term dates and their academic timetable as soon as these become available to identify dates where their university commitments might conflict with a date on which they would like to undertake important religious observance. Term dates are published in advance of the academic year on the website.
16. If students have mandatory religious requirements that may affect their attendance at normal teaching and learning activities, they should discuss the issue with their School.
17. A student who would like to request approval for absence from University to observe a religious festival or undertake other religious practice should make a request by email to their Course Office at the earliest possible opportunity and

no later than three weeks before the date of the absence requested. Your School will aim to process your form within seven calendar days of receipt.

18. The School will give consideration to cases from students whose mandatory religious observance would otherwise cause them to miss scheduled teaching or learning activities in circumstances where religious observance occurs over a restricted period and will try to make reasonable adjustments/alternative arrangements, if at all possible.
19. However, adjustments can only be made provided they maintain the standard of the student's degree (e.g. students will not simply be excused from parts of the programme affected by religious observance or from satisfying the overall learning outcomes).
20. The University will consider proportionate, practicable alternatives to avoid disrupting scheduled teaching or learning activities. If, after such consideration, no such alternative is identified, adjustments to the timing or location of those activities will not proceed. This does not restrict lawful academic judgement about course content and methods, nor the University's ability to make adjustments required to meet its legal obligations.
21. If a student fails to attend a class or other university activity without prior approval this will be treated like any other unauthorised absence.

### **Examinations & Assessments Process**

22. If Religious Observance is likely to affect your attendance at an examination or assessment you must apply for alternative arrangements at the earliest possible opportunity and no later than three weeks before the start of the exam period (for examinations organised centrally by the Exams Office) or assessment deadline (for those assessments organised by the School.)
23. To request alternative arrangements under this policy you should submit the Religious Observance Application Form alongside supporting evidence at least three weeks before the start of the examination period or the affected assessment deadline. An example of evidence may be supporting letter from the faith leader of the community with which you practice advising the significance of the event and your participation. The application form is available [here](#).
24. Once an application is submitted, you are advising the University you are unable to sit the examination or assessment at the originally scheduled time and will therefore take up the alternative arrangements where it is possible for the University to offer them.

25. The University will consider all applications on a case-by-case basis.
26. Your request for alternative arrangements will be considered and approved alongside the following considerations:
- a. The duration of the religious observance;
  - b. If and when there will be a further opportunity to sit the examination or assessment in the module;
  - c. Whether the next available opportunity to sit the examination or assessment will impact the time it would take to progress and/or complete the programme;
  - d. The academic integrity and academic standards of the examination or assessment, including the need to preserve assessment security.
  - e. Any other relevant factor which may impact on the request.
27. Where your application is approved, the University will make every effort to reschedule the examination or assessment to accommodate your needs. However, it may not always be appropriate or possible to grant a request for alternative arrangements, for example a group work assessment where approval of the request may have detrimental consequences on other members of the group.
28. Approved requests for alternative arrangements will be arranged within the same examination or assessment period, where possible.
29. Where it is possible to make alternative arrangements within the same examination or assessment period, a separate assessment will be sat. This will be moderated to ensure it is in line with the other assessment arrangements.
30. It may not always be possible for us to rearrange the assessment during the same examination or assessment period. In this instance you may be offered an opportunity to take the assessment at a future date, which will normally be at the next available opportunity for the affected examination or assessment.
31. Should you be offered an alternative date for your examination or assessment at the next available opportunity, this may mean that you will not be able to progress to the next academic year or graduate as planned. This will depend on when the assessment or examination will next take place which may be in the August assessment period, or during a future term, whichever is first. Where this is the case, your School will let you know so you can make an informed decision about when to take the affected assessments and/or examinations. For more information, please contact the Course Office for your programme.
32. If you sit and fail an examination that was offered to you as a result of a successful application for alternative arrangements, you will need to wait until

the next available opportunity to resit the examination or assessment. This depends on when the assessment or examination will next take place. This may be in the August assessment period, or during a future term, whichever is first. In such cases, it may mean that you will not be able to progress to the next academic year or graduate as planned.

33. Should you wish to request for a resit examination or assessment to be rescheduled, you will need to be aware that if it is not possible to rearrange it within the same period, you will not be able to take your resit until the next available opportunity. This may increase the time it takes for you to progress or graduate.
34. We will work with and offer support to students nearing their maximum period of registration who make a request for alternative examination or assessments. In this instance, any support provided will be considered by taking a case-by-case approach in line with our Assessment Regulations.
35. If you are a postgraduate Research student, you must consult the Viva Voce or Oral Examination Policy before requesting any adjustments to your viva due to Religious Observance. As oral examination dates are mutually agreed with the student, you should make every effort to ensure that you inform your Supervisor of your Religious Observance commitments before a viva date is set.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

City St George's, University of London

36. We will consider and process requests for alternative arrangements fairly, promptly and in line with our duty to uphold our statutory and regulatory requirements including academic standards.
37. For requests related to Examinations & Assessments, there will be considered by the Examinations Office for examinations organised centrally by the University or by the Module Leader in discussion with the Programme Director for assessments organised locally by the School. We aim to process your form within seven calendar days of receipt but no later than by the publication of assessment dates.
38. While we will attempt to accommodate your request for alternative arrangements based on Religious Observance wherever possible, the nature of a particular course, placement or type of assessment may mean we are unable to find a suitable alternative.
39. We will ensure that our staff members have access to training and resources to provide you with advice and support when requesting alternative arrangements.

40. We will provide you with guidance and information on the possible impact of delaying an examination or assessment to the next available opportunity as explained in this policy. For more information about the possible impact of delaying an examination or assessment, please contact the Course Office for your programme.
41. Our Chaplaincy Team will provide support and guidance to students who may wish to request alternative arrangements for examinations or assessments due to Religious Observance. The Team will also provide specialist advice and guidance to any staff members responsible for the approval of requests. Please note that it is not the role of the Chaplaincy Team to provide you with evidence in support of your request for alternative arrangements unless you practice with them. For more information about our Chaplaincy Team, please visit the Student Hub. You can also contact the Team here.

## Students

42. You are expected to read this policy and any accompanying guidance prior to making a request for alternative arrangements.
43. You should seek advice and guidance from your Course Office, the Students' Union or the Chaplaincy prior to making a request for alternative arrangements for examinations and assessments. This will ensure that you can receive the right level of support.
44. The University will publicise examination and assessment dates well in advance of their deadlines. If a deadline for coursework falls on an important religious day, you are expected to have prepared to submit it before that day wherever possible. You should ensure that you plan your work so that you meet coursework deadlines.
45. You have a responsibility to tell us about any alternative arrangements you may require as a result of Religious Observance and provide documentary evidence, where required. We strongly recommend that you notify us if you require alternative arrangements to support you to observe your religious requirements as soon as you become aware of any diary conflicts and at least three weeks before the start of the exam period or assessment. This is so we can support you. We may not be able to consider late requests for due to the time it takes to process and rearrange assessments.
46. You are expected to submit evidence alongside your Religious Observance Application Form. An example of evidence may be a supporting letter from the faith leader of the community with which you practice advising the significance of the event and your participation.

47. You may be able to submit your Religious Observance Application Form without documentary evidence. In such cases, you will be required to provide a reasonable explanation, as part of your submission, as to the reason(s) why you are unable to provide the relevant evidence to support your alternative arrangements request. You should only use this option, where it is not possible for you to provide supporting evidence.
48. You should ensure that you familiarise yourself with your assessment deadlines and examination timetable as soon as these are published and check whether your ability to attend will be impacted by your religious observance.
49. You should ensure that you understand the implications of delaying an examination or assessment to the next available opportunity as explained in this policy.

#### Students' Union

50. The Students' Union can support you with your application process for alternative arrangements on the grounds of Religious Observance.
51. The Students' Union works collaboratively with the University in our culture of enhancement and provide expert advice on Religious Observance regarding examinations and assessments improving student experience.
52. The Students' Union can also support you with submitting complaints if you are not satisfied with the outcome or the process for your Religious Observance Application form.

#### Complaints Process

53. Should you wish to submit a complaint about decisions regarding requests for alternative arrangements for examinations or assessments you should follow the procedures set out in Regulation 26: Student Complaints as soon as possible. If matters are left for too long it may be impossible for us to investigate properly and find a suitable remedy.

## **Appendix A - Religious Observance Policy Guidance for Students**

This guidance has been developed to supplement the Religious Observance Policy. You are advised to read the full Policy before making an application to ensure you fully understand the process and how it fits with your studies.

Student guidance on submitting alternative arrangements requests:

54. When submitting a request for alternative arrangements on religious observance, you are normally expected to submit some form of evidence alongside your request wherever possible. The evidence can be in the form of a letter from the faith leader of the religious community you are practicing with. Other forms of evidence are also acceptable as long as they clearly state both the religious commitment and your requirement to observe it. The date(s) of your religious commitment should be clearly stated on the form of evidence.
55. The University will accept as faith leaders people of all genders who are recognised by their faith community, both formally and informally, as playing authoritative and influential leadership roles within their faith institutions to guide, inspire or lead others.
56. Where you are practicing with the University's Chaplaincy, one of the team will be able to attest this through the evidence they will provide for you. You will need to be known to the Chaplaincy team ahead of your application for them to be able to provide any accompanying evidence.
57. Where you have made every effort to obtain evidence, but it has not been possible for you to do so, you may submit an application without it. Where you apply without evidence, you are advised as per the policy, to provide a reasonable explanation as to the reason(s) why you are unable to provide the relevant evidence to support your alternative arrangements request. It may be helpful to provide online resources that show the significance of a religious event to support your application.

Teaching & Learning Activities:

58. If you have mandatory religious requirements that may affect your attendance at normal teaching and learning activities, you should make a request by email to your Course Office at the earliest possible opportunity and no later than three weeks before the date of the absence requested.
59. The School will give consideration to students on a case by case basis and will try, as far as it is reasonable and practical to do so, to make reasonable adjustments/alternative arrangements.
60. If no reasonable alternative can be found, adjustments to scheduled teaching or learning activities will not be possible.

61. If a student fails to attend a class or other university activity without prior approval this will be treated like any other unauthorised absence.

#### Examination Arrangements:

62. In as far as possible, the University will aim not to schedule examinations on major religious festival in order to anticipate your needs. It is considered good practice for examinations and assessments not to be scheduled at a time when students may have other commitments, for example in the evening or at the weekend. Staff are advised to follow this practice to minimise the need for students to request alternative arrangements.

63. Where you have successfully requested alternative arrangements on religious observance grounds, the following outcomes will apply:

a. You will be offered the opportunity to take the examination or assessment on a different date during the same examination period.  
OR

b. You will be offered the opportunity to take the examination or assessment at the next available opportunity, for example during the next period that the affected examination or assessment runs.

64. When applying for alternative arrangements, you need to be aware that there is no guarantee that it will be possible for the University or the School to offer you the opportunity to take the examination or assessment during the same examination period. You may have to wait a significant period of time, which may affect your ability to progress to the next stage.

65. You are advised to request alternative arrangements as soon as possible. It is good practice to submit a request as soon as you become aware of any conflict between your examination or assessment and any religious commitments you may have and not wait until the three weeks deadline.

66. During an examination, some students may need to take time out for prayer. We will do our best to facilitate this, but it is not guaranteed. You will need to get in touch with the Examination Office ahead of your scheduled examination so invigilators can be made aware of your prayer needs. If examination invigilators have the capacity, you may leave the room for prayer. Please be advised that you will not get the time back. Praying schedules are published to students so please do consult these ahead of your examinations.

67. When organising examinations, staff are advised to make arrangements where female examiners will be guaranteed to make certain checks for religious sensitivity (for example when invigilators may need to check for earphones).

#### Other University processes:

68. There may be some instances in which other processes at City St George's, University of London are more appropriate to support you depending on your circumstances.

### **Extenuating Circumstances**

69. You are advised to consult the Extenuating Circumstances Policy for unforeseeable or unpreventable events such as where particular religious observance is required when the death of a close relative occurs and when specified forms or mourning are required.

70. You are also advised to apply for extenuating circumstances in cases where your welfare is impacted as a result of activities undertaken due to religious observance that have a detrimental effect on your performance during an examination. An example of this may be fainting during an examination as a result of fasting.

71. In cases where your welfare is impacted as a result of activities undertaken due to religious observance that have a detrimental effect on the preparation for a coursework assessment, you may consider requesting an extension. Where the submission deadline has passed, you should then use the extenuating circumstances policy.

### **Interruption of Studies**

72. There may be times when observing your religion will require that you take a longer period out of your studies. For example, if you wish to undertake a pilgrimage or a similar event, you will need to consult the Interruption of Studies Policy and apply for an interruption of studies instead of using the process outlined in this document.

### **Extensions**

73. When requesting alternative arrangements on the grounds of religious observance for a piece of coursework, you may be offered an extension as a potential successful outcome. Where this is the case, your religious observance request will be processed in line with your School's Extension policy.

74. You are advised to consult and familiarise with the extension process in your School to know what to expect. School Extension Processes can be found here:

- School of Policy & Global Affairs
- School of Communication & Creativity
- School of Science & Technology
- School of Health & Psychological Sciences
- The City Law School (UG)
- The City Law School (PG)
- **For the BAYES Business School please contact your course office team.**

## **Appendix B: Religious Observance Policy Data Protection Statement**

75. Your trust is very important to us. This means the University is committed to protecting the privacy and security of your personal information.
76. It is important that you read this notice so that you are aware of how and why we are using such information. This privacy notice describes how we collect and use personal information about you during and after your relationship with us, in accordance with data protection law.
77. You can find additional information here.
78. City St George's will collect and process the personal information that you have provided to us about yourself and your Religious Observance request for alternative arrangements. This personal information includes your name, contact address, and telephone number.
79. City St George's will also collect and process certain special categories of more sensitive personal information if it pertains to your Religious Observance claim. Either within your written statement, or as part of the corresponding evidence you have provided (where relevant). This information might include any of the following where appropriate:
- race or ethnicity
  - religious or philosophical beliefs
  - health and medical
  - sexual orientation
80. Where you need to provide such information, please carefully consider if it is pertinent to your Religious Observance request. You should only share information relating to the request you are making.
81. City St George's is the 'data controller' of this information. This means that City St George's decides what your personal information is used for, and the ways in which it is processed.
82. The personal information and special categories of information that you provide, will be processed securely for the purposes of processing your request for alternative arrangements.
83. The legal basis on which City St George's processes your personal information is on the basis of public task. City St George's is an educational and research establishment and in particular its educational and research activity is conducted in a public interest (including your interest and the interest of others).

Where we process special category data, the lawful basis we rely on is 'substantial public interest'.

84. City St George's will retain the information you provide under this Religious Observance process for 6 years from the date last actioned for submitted requests. We will also retain information for 3 months for any claims which were started on Qualtrics but not submitted. We will not share the information you provide with any third parties. If you have any questions about how City St George's handles your personal information, or you wish to find out about your rights, please visit the University's Privacy Notice. You will also be able to find out more about how City St George's processes your information and how you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer via email at [dpo@citystgeorges.ac.uk](mailto:dpo@citystgeorges.ac.uk). Where there is inconsistency between those documents and this notice, this notice shall prevail.
85. If you raise a concern with City St George's about the way it has handled your personal information, you are entitled to lodge a concern with a supervisory authority. In the UK, the supervisory authority is the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

<b>Policy Title</b>	
Religious Observance Policy and Guidance	
<b>Policy Enabling Owner and Department</b>	<b>Responsible for Implementation and Department</b>
Academic Services	Academic Services
<b>Approving Body</b>	<b>Date of Approval</b>
Senate	July 2023
<b>Last Reviewed &amp; Version</b>	<b>Review Due Date</b>
V2	2026
<b>Publication of Policy</b> ( <i>tick as appropriate</i> )	
<b>For public access online (internet)?</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<b>For staff access only (intranet)?</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Website Link:</b> <a href="https://www.citystgeorges.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/student-policies-and-regulations">https://www.citystgeorges.ac.uk/about/governance/policies/student-policies-and-regulations</a>	<b>Intranet Link:</b> <a href="https://staffhub.citystgeorges.ac.uk/academic-services/policies-and-guidance/quality-manual/student-support">https://staffhub.citystgeorges.ac.uk/academic-services/policies-and-guidance/quality-manual/student-support</a>
<b>Storage of Policy</b> ( <i>Previous versions of the policy must be stored in the drive by the author</i> )	
<b>Drive Address:</b> ..\..\..\Quality Manual\5. Student Support\Religious Observance	
<b>Queries about this policy should be referred to</b>	
QUAD@citystgeorges.ac.uk	