



October 2021

Employees' Religion and Belief Observance Policy

Policy Statement

Many religions and beliefs are represented in our multi-cultural society and the organisation recognises that people may wish to observe the requirements of their chosen religion or belief system while at work. The organisation aims to ensure a fair and consistent approach in the management of such requests so that no worker is discriminated against on the basis of their religion, belief, or absence of religion or belief.

This policy applies in the workplace and at all events that are work related.

Procedure

General considerations

While the organisation aims to be sensitive to the needs of its workers, workers also have a responsibility to ensure that their manager is aware, in good time, of their individual needs to meet the requirements of their belief or religion. This will ensure that there is ample opportunity for those needs to be considered and for the appropriate actions to be taken (where practicable).

Although the organisation will take reasonable steps to try to accommodate requests, workers must understand that they have a responsibility to be reasonable when asking for time off or for other work adjustments to facilitate their religious observance so that the organisation and colleagues are not unduly inconvenienced.

Time off for religious festivals or worship

Time off for religious festivals should be taken as a part of the normal annual holiday entitlement or, with management's agreement, as unpaid leave.

Requests for time off should be made in writing to the manager, ideally giving at least 4 weeks' notice. Where the date(s) required is (are) known in advance, workers should aim to provide as much notice as is reasonably practicable.

Priority will be given to requests on a "first-come, first-served" basis. Requests will be considered individually and where there is a high level of demand for time off requests will be treated fairly and equitably. In all cases, requests will be balanced with organisational needs to ensure that the operation of the organisation remains unaffected.

Any workers requiring a permanent change to their regular pattern of hours as a result of a religious observance requirement should discuss this with their manager, who will assess if it is possible to alter the hours of work while continuing to meet the needs of the organisation.

However, in attempting to meet a worker's request for time off to observe a particular practice or festival of a religion or belief, the organisation will also ensure that it does not disadvantage those employees who do not hold any specific religion or belief.

Fasting, prayers and other religious obligations

Some religions require their followers to pray at specific times during the day. Should workers request access to an appropriate quiet place to undertake their religious observances, then providing that such a quiet place is available, and allowing its use for prayer does not cause problems for other workers or the organisation, the manager will consider the request sympathetically.

Workers can request that their rest breaks coincide with their religious obligations to pray at certain times of the day. The organisation will endeavour to accommodate such requests. However, a manager can refuse such a request if, for example, it conflicts with legitimate organisational needs which cannot be met in any other way.

Some religions or beliefs require extended periods of fasting, for example, during Ramadan it is obligatory for Muslims to refrain from eating and drinking (even water) during the hours between dawn and sunset. Should workers feel that they need support during such a period, they should inform their manager who will then consider how best to provide the necessary support. However, all decisions will take into account the needs of the organisation to ensure that unreasonable extra burdens are not placed on other workers, as this may cause conflict or give rise to claims of discrimination.

Managers should consider how they can best provide support to Muslim workers during periods of fasting such as Ramadan. For example, they should, following consultation with their staff, consider:

- allowing flexibility in start and finish times to accommodate Muslim employees who wish to eat at sunset
- allowing staff to swap shifts or rotas if they wish
- allowing staff to use flexi-time to work shorter hours
- permitting employees who wish it to take a shorter lunch break in return for an earlier finishing time (but not less than 20 minutes as this is the minimum break required by the Working Time Regulations 1998 whenever the working day lasts six hours or more)
- adjusting the timing of breaks so that employees who are fasting can take a break at sunset (or just before dawn for night-shift workers) in order to eat
- avoiding working lunches as much as possible as Muslim employees will not be able to eat at that time of day
- refraining from arranging any important events, eg training courses or conferences, during Ramadan (as employees who are fasting will lack energy in the afternoons).
- refraining from organising afternoon meetings if they are likely to continue until sunset or beyond dusk.

Dietary requirements

Some religions or beliefs have specific dietary requirements. If workers bring food into the workplace, they may need to store and heat food separately from other food. Should such an issue arise, the manager will consult with all staff concerned to try to ensure a solution is found. This may be as simple as using plastic containers for the food in a shared fridge.

The organisation will ensure that, at all work-related social gatherings where alcohol is available, non-alcoholic alternatives are available.

If food is provided by the organisation for the workers as part of a workplace event, it is the responsibility of the worker to inform the manager in good time of any dietary requirements, and to co-operate in suggesting reasonable suitable alternatives.

Alternative clause

The organisation will endeavour to ensure that the in-house catering facilities supply a selection of foods and beverages prepared in accordance with the dietary requirements of the religion or beliefs of particular groups of workers.

Workers should contact Julie Partridge to discuss specific issues relating to the provision of special types of food and beverages appropriate to their religion or belief.

Personal appearance and dress

Should workers feel that the dress code in place in their workplace conflicts with the dress requirements of their religion, they should raise the issue with the manager. The manager and the worker will together investigate possible adjustments in order to accommodate the dress requirements of the worker's religion or belief. However, such adjustments need to be made in a manner that is compatible with the requirements of the organisation and that ensures the health and safety of workers.

Some religions require their followers to wear particular jewellery, headwear or other apparel. While the manager will consider each request sympathetically, the needs of the organisation must also be considered and the requirements of health and safety legislation will need to take priority.

Harassment and victimisation

The organisation will not tolerate any form of harassment or victimisation of its workers on the grounds of their religion or belief, the religion or belief of anyone with whom they associate, or the absence of a religion or belief.

Whilst all workers have the right to hold religious and other beliefs, it is not permitted for a worker to seek to impose their religious beliefs on other workers (or on families, children, etc), or to seek to persuade colleagues (or any other person) to convert to their religion.

Raising Issues Related to this Policy

If workers are dissatisfied about any arrangements made (or denied) to accommodate a request under this policy, and they would like the matter to be investigated further, the matter should be raised using the grievance procedure.

Workers should also use the grievance procedure if they feel that they have been discriminated against, harassed or victimised in any way.