

## University of Edinburgh

### Guidance for Schools on situations where religious observance (such as fasting) has potential health and safety implications for academic learning activity

- The University welcomes students from all faiths. While health and safety questions sometimes arise about participation in an academic activity due to religious observance, staff should ensure that, wherever possible, health and safety considerations are not a barrier to participation so as to not disadvantage students of faith.
- A practical solution is usually straightforward to attain, in conversation between the student/s and School.
- The University Chaplaincy is used to giving advice and support to students and staff in such cases. The Chaplaincy is a multi-faith and belief service, and is able to advise on the flexibility possible around religious observance, in any given situation. Email: [Chaplain@ed.ac.uk](mailto:Chaplain@ed.ac.uk)
- Students are encouraged to speak with their School as early as they can, if they foresee potential issues for their involvement in an academic activity (e.g. arduous field trips or lab work during periods of fasting; religious dress or hygiene laws in relation to certain practical activities).
- Schools are encouraged to train students to consider the risks and health and safety requirements associated with their discipline, with appropriate breadth and foresight. Such training puts students in a reasonable position to flag up any potential issues regarding their religious observance in relation to academic activity.
- Wherever possible, the School should seek a mutually satisfactory solution, which minimally disrupts the academic requirements and the religious observance. Options to explore include:
  - Whether potential flexibility in the student's religious observation or mitigations of the health and safety risks might enable the student to continue safely with the planned learning activities;
  - Whether the student could undertake the relevant learning activity at a later date (for example, whether they could postpone the affected fieldwork until the next session);
  - Whether the student could undertake any alternative learning activities which cover the same learning outcomes
- Where a practical solution is not easy to see, the School and/or student are invited to call on the University Chaplaincy, Director of Student Wellbeing and the Director of Academic Services for assistance.
- Schools should not permit students to participate in a learning activity if, after exploring the options, there is an unacceptable level of risk either to the student or to other parties and no reasonable way to mitigate that risk. Should the School reach this conclusion, the student will be able to appeal to the Head of School, who will decide how to resolve the matter.
- Sometimes School and students find an unforeseen issue arising at the point where the academic activity is almost or already underway. In such cases, the staff-lead must exercise their professional judgement, and is encouraged, where possible, to consult the Chaplain, Director of Student Wellbeing, and the Director of Academic Services.