

What is the experience of students of faith and belief on campus?

Over the past few decades, the religion or belief composition of students in UK has diversified substantially. Research has shown a variety of issues which can affect a positive learning environment for students of various faith or belief backgrounds.

Alcohol

The first couple of weeks at university can be scary and unfamiliar to first year students. Students' unions are very good at organising events and activities during Welcome Week and the start of term (as well as throughout the year), to help new students settle in to their new surroundings.

However, many of the evening events or entertainment is held in students' union bars or venues where alcohol is being served.

This can often be a barrier to socialising for students who find it uncomfortable to be in venue's serving alcohol or where people are consuming alcohol.

Some comments from students:

"I don't want it to be a non-alcoholic event and only I turn up. For some people, alcohol is the way they relax. If there was a non-alcoholic event no one would turn up. If you could have non-alcoholic event that people would come to then that would be great"

"The whole year knows each other but they don't know you because you don't go to their entertainment events. It is difficult to socialise. Some people think Muslims are quite insular. It's not that we don't want to socialise. We would love to. I don't feel comfortable in these situations."

[ECU report \(2011\)](#)

Inadequate facilities for prayer, reflection or meditation

Some institutions have fantastic multi-functional facilities for students and staff to pray and use for reflection. But others may provide unsuitable rooms or no space at all forcing many students to go off campus.

There is a huge disparity between the facilities institutions provide for students and staff to pray, meditate or reflect. This can be a dispiriting experience for many students of faith and belief and can affect how they feel about their institution and have an impact on their chances of academic success.

You can see photographic evidence alongside quotes from students from the NUS Where I Pray Campaign [here](#).

Hate Crime

NUS research on hate crime incidents around students of faith and belief found, amongst other things, that almost one fifth of hate incidents experienced by students in further and higher education were thought to have an element of religious prejudice, making up 7% of all incidents reported in the survey.

The full report entitled No Place for Hate (2012) can be found [here](#).

Food provision

There are many challenges in providing food for the varying needs of different student faith groups. Not all of these issues will be relevant at every institution but it is important to consider the possibility.

Some comments from students and staff

"All Jains won't eat eggs. A lot of colleagues just won't understand this. A lot of my friends just lie and say they have an egg allergy. There is no other way of explaining it to the kitchen."

"I don't think this should be something we should have to fight for. It should be something we should get. It's easy enough to get vegetarian food, vegan food, dairy free. Why not halal. It's just another option."

"Generally, vegetarian food is well catered for; however, the advent of halal food fails to recognise that many communities, including non-vegetarian Hindus and Sikhs find this type of meat served by default to be morally unacceptable"

[ECU report \(2011\)](#)

Isolation and Vulnerability

In 2014 NUS conducted research with 1,013 HE students with over 80% reporting to have a faith or belief. A survey was also conducted with welfare, advice and pastoral staff in students' unions and institutions providing NUS with a wide range of data to draw from including:

- 1 in 10 respondents reported that issues of faith and belief were related to their feelings of mental distress.
- Of the faith and belief issues disclosed to staff the most prevalent were the following: conflict between faith and sexuality (49%), prejudice or harassment due to faith (46%) and crisis of faith (39%).
- There are surges of seeking support about the following themes on campus: alcohol based events (56%) and prayer space (38%).

The full report can be found [here](#).

Promoting religion

The promotion of religion or belief space is an important factor in the way that staff and students identify and use the provision.

Responses to an Equality Challenge Unit survey (2010/11) indicated that there are issues about how the provision of faith space and the associated activities are promoted. While some institutions have deliberate and well-articulated policies on promoting or signposting religion or belief space, this is not the case for all.

The survey responses indicated that some students and staff had not been aware of the facilities and had discovered the multi-faith space by accident. The lack of promotion of such facilities can be an official policy and can at times seem paradoxical as one survey respondent explained:

'They are not allowed to advertise the facilities. I really feel this is wrong. If raves; drinking events; sports events; student socials; Halloween events can be advertised then why can't church be thrown into the mix? I am not offended by the fore mentioned being advertised. If we are considered free and sensible enough to decide if we want to go to a rave then surely we have the sense to decide if we would like to attend a church service or fellowship event. The first three weeks were a lonely time for me, I felt quite depressed, I would have loved to have known where I could have met people I identify with.'

[ECU report \(2011\)](#)

