

What are the common problems students of faith and belief face?

People's faiths and beliefs are very important in shaping the way they live although, of course, individuals vary in their practise. Students of faith and belief will have a range of needs which may impact their experience of campus life.

Exams and timetabling

Different times of the day, week or year may see number of varying faith commitments which may affect a student's ability to participate in educational or social activities. These include holy days, days of observance and special occasions.

A few examples are given below but these are not exhaustive and may not necessarily apply to your student body. Therefore it is essential to research the demographics on your campus.

Sabbath – the Jewish day of rest occurs from sunset Friday to sunset Saturday. Not all students may observe the Sabbath in the same degree, if at all. If lectures do not finish till after 5pm during the winter months, some Jewish students may not be able to attend.

Ramadan – this is a month in the Islamic calendar during which observing Muslims fast (no food and no water) from dawn to dusk. As the Islamic calendar is a lunar one the dates of the month change a few days each year. In 2015 and 2016 the month will fall in June, starting earlier each year thereafter.

This means that Ramadan may coincide with exam times and fasting students may not be able to perform to the best of their ability. In this situation possible solutions are to schedule exams for earlier in the day when students when those fasting may be less affected by hunger or later in the evening after the fast has been broken.

Food provision

Different faith and belief systems may require a range of catering needs for example:

- **Hinduism** – some Hindus are vegetarian and many do not eat beef
- **Islam** – halal which means a particular method of slaughter of the animal and also animal welfare. Muslims generally don't eat pork or consume alcohol.
- **Jainism** – lacto-vegetarianism – no eggs, meat, poultry, fish
- **Judaism** – Kosher – several rules must be followed for food to be considered kosher including the separation of meat, dairy and non-dairy foods.
- **Sikhism** – many are vegetarian however some eat meat

The level of observance will vary according to the individual but it is important to consider the needs of your student body and the wider context.

Questions to consider include:

- Is there a halal butcher/ supermarket stocking kosher meat nearby that students can access?
- Does the canteen offer vegetarian options every day?
- Are there any other food outlets on campus or nearby and do they stock a variety of options?
- Is it mandatory for students to eat at the canteen?

Prayer and meditation space

For many students prayer and/or meditation will be a part of the way they live out their faith. Prayer and meditation are also important aspects of a person's wellbeing. Prayer can take many forms and providing space for this can be an important aspect for students.

There is no legal requirement for institutions to provide prayer facilities for students or staff, but consideration should be given to the needs of students who do require facilities and time for prayer.

This may be particularly important for international students who might be used to having prayer spaces in close proximity and may choose to not attend a university based on their prayer space/food provision.

Questions to consider include:

- How big is the campus? What is the best location for a prayer space(s)?
- Is accommodation far away or close to campus?
- How might students be affected if they have to go off campus to pray?
- Should the prayer space be multi-faith, if so how should it be organised?
- Does the prayer space have appropriate washing facilities nearby? (Some faiths such as Islam require washing before prayer)

For case studies and model responses to these issues and more see the [Case Studies toolkit](#) from Religious Literacy Leadership in Higher Education

Pastoral care

Students of faith and belief may have unique needs when it comes to pastoral care as their faith will be a key part of their identity which will impact on how they perceive all aspects of their life.

In some institutions or unions' chaplaincy are given the role of pastoral care for students of faith – for more on this see our briefing on ['What is Chaplaincy?'](#)

Questions to consider include:

- Will the student feel comfortable sharing their particular issue with someone who does not share their faith?
- Do student welfare and counselling services account for the student's faith?
- Are chaplaincy services adequate for dealing with the faiths present on campus?

