

FE - What are the challenges for students of faith and belief on campus?

Different faith and belief groups have different needs – this can lead to a number of challenges for students of faith and belief on campus in FE.

A national student survey undertaken in FE found that over 70% of students believe that learning and skills providers and workplaces should provide support and services for students and trainees who hold different values, beliefs and faiths.¹

When colleges are not well equipped to handle issues related to faith, belief and the inherent overlaps with cultural practise, tension and conflict can become a significant issue on campus harming students' welfare and in turn disrupting students' educational attainment.

A proactive approach to faith and belief and its overlap with culture and ethnicity is important to not only mitigate against conflict in the student body, but also to equip students to successfully navigate the multi-faith and multi-cultural society they will be in when they leave college.

Inadequate facilities for prayer, reflection or meditation

Some FE 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.

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.

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](#).

If your college does have a prayer or reflection space questions to consider are:

- Is it a welcoming space, fit for purpose?
- Are students aware of it - does it form part of the welcome tours? Is it highlighted in campus maps?
- How can you monitor how it is being used?
- 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)

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

¹ Learning Skills and Improvement Service (LSIS) Guidance on SMSC, <http://www.smisc.org.uk/webs/288/documents/SMSCWeb.pdf>

- **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 – meaning 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** – some Sikhs 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:

- 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?

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 \(2011\)](#)

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 infosheet: 'FE – 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?



Hate Crime

Unfortunately bullying and harassment can be commonplace experiences for students of faith and belief in FE.

This can be the case for those whose faith is highly visible, for example, Muslim women wearing headscarves, Sikh men wearing turbans, as well as those whose faith might not be so obvious such as Christian students.

NUS research on hate crime incidents around students of faith and belief found 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](#).