

## Policy and Procedure on Religious Observance and Assessment

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### 1. Introduction and Scope

- 1.1. This policy and procedure set out the College's approach to managing adjustments or accommodation for religious observance for fixed, time limited assessment.
- 1.2. Imperial College is aware that assessments, such as examinations, can be very stressful and would strive to ameliorate, where possible, any situations where one individual or group of students might be unreasonably disadvantaged by factors which are not relevant to the assessment.
- 1.3. The Imperial College student population includes people from many different religious groups and also many with no religious affiliation at all.
- 1.4. Imperial College has a very large student population, and each year has to set a vast number of examinations and other assessments throughout the academic year. This creates pressure on suitable space to conduct in-person assessment, especially at peak times. These factors can inhibit flexibility for individual departments.
- 1.5. This policy describes how the College will seek to limit the impact on students that have mandatory religious observance that prevents them working on particular day(s).
- 1.6. This only applies to assessment such as in-person exams or timed online assessment which take place on a specified date. It excludes coursework or other forms of assessment which may be prepared for over an extended period of time and then submitted for marking. Students are expected to plan their time to accommodate such work and are encouraged to discuss support needs with the department in good time.
- 1.7. This policy does not apply to:
  - a) Casual, social or domestic preferences, even where these may be influenced by religion or faith;
  - b) Events which are not known about in advance e.g. funeral or mourning arrangements following bereavement;

- c) Marriages or other events, the timing of which are arranged by individuals rather than being determined by the religion itself;
  - d) Pilgrimages or other such activities which may require more than just a few days or which do not take place at a predetermined point in time;
  - e) Observances during which it is expected that the normal daily activity should continue e.g. Ramadan (Islam) or the month of fasting (Baha'i);
  - f) other religious festivals that are not listed in Annex A, unless it is a mandatory requirement.
- 1.8. Where excluded circumstances such as in paragraph 1.7 above or other unforeseen difficulties arise – such as adverse health consequences of fasting – the College's standard mitigating circumstances procedure applies. Guidance is provided at Annex B with regards to fasting during assessment periods.
- 1.9. The college's Multi-Faith Chaplaincy (<https://www.imperial.ac.uk/chaplaincy>) is available to provide advice and guidance on individual issues arising related to the points raised in this paper. The chaplaincy has associate chaplains from the Jewish, Roman Catholic, Hindu, and Baha'i faiths in addition to links with the Muslim Chaplaincy Trust in London.

## **2. Requests for Assessment Arrangements**

- 2.1. Requests for individual arrangements should be made using the relevant form provided with this policy and submitted to the department or contact. The former should be countersigned by a faith leader who is able to confirm that a student is an adherent of the faith specified in the request. Where this is not feasible, a student should add a short explanation to the form.
- 2.2. Appropriate arrangements will be determined by each academic department on a case-by-case basis, considering the needs of the student and the nature and timing of the assessment.
- 2.3. The department will advertise a deadline by which the form must be submitted, after which applications will only be considered on a best endeavour's basis.
- 2.4. Where students are taking an assessment outside their home department, this needs to be discussed both with the department setting the assessment as well as the student's home department. For advice and support students should contact their Departmental Senior Tutor (or equivalent).

### 3. Possible outcomes/mitigations

3.1. Arrangements will usually comprise of one of the following:

- a) approving an alternative date for the original assessment, proximate to the original sitting;
- b) Failing (a) above and at student request, approving an alternative date for a subsequent assessment, such as during the resit period.

3.2. In cases where an alternative date is proximate to the standard assessment and students will sit the original assessment, they may be required to put chaperone arrangements in place. Where a student is unable to arrange in person chaperoning, they must complete a self-declaration included with this policy. It is recommended that the maximum period of chaperoning is sufficient to covers a weekend, approximately 72 hours.

3.3. A chaperone is usually a responsible adult unrelated to the programme of study and would normally be in a position of authority such as a faith leader. Any chaperone arrangements must be agreed in advance with the module leader/programme director.

3.4. Where a student has assessments in close proximity to the assessment that has to be moved to an alternative date close to the originally scheduled time, the Department should discuss with the student how best to manage the impact, ensuring that as many assessments are taken at their advised time. This might entail an exemption from the examination timetabling policy.

3.5. Where a student is taking the paper for the first time during the late summer assessment 'resit' period, the implications of this need to be taken into account and discussed with the student to ensure any impact on progression or award are identified and agreed.

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**Religious festivals for which observance prohibits work**

The table below lists holidays and festivals for some of the major religions. It is limited to those which do not permit work. Please note that it is unlikely to be definitive because of the different degrees of observance within faith and the number of religions which students may follow. This table will be updated prior to each academic year in order to support planning for students and staff in relation to examinations.

<b>Event / Festival</b>	<b>Religion</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2026</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Naw Ruz	Baha'i <sup>1</sup>	21 Mar	20 Mar	20 Mar	21 Mar	
Ridvan	Baha'i	21 Apr – 2 May	20 Apr – 1 May	20 Apr – 1 May	21 Apr – 2 May	On the first, ninth and twelfth days of Riḍván no work is permitted
Declaration of the Bab	Baha'i	24 May	23 May	23 May	24 May	
Ascension of Baha'u'llah	Baha'i	29 May	28 May	28 May	29 May	
Shavuot	Judaism <sup>2</sup>	25-27 May	11-12 June	1-3 June	21-23 May	Begins at sundown of day 1, and ends at nightfall day 3
Martyrdom of the Bab	Baha'i	10 July	9 July	9 July	10 Jul	
Sukkot	Judaism	29 Sept – 6 Oct	16-23 Oct	6-13 Oct	25 Sept – 2 Oct*	No work from sunset to sunset
Birth of the Bab & Birth of Baha'u'llah	Baha'i	16/17 Oct	2/3 Nov	22/23 Oct	10-11 Nov	No work from sunset to sunset

<sup>1</sup> Dates obtained from [A Bahá'í Glossary - Bahá'í Dates 172 to 221 B.E. \(abahaiglossary.org\)](http://abahaiglossary.org)

<sup>2</sup> Dates obtained from [Dates of Upcoming Jewish/Israeli Holidays and Festivals \(jewishvirtuallibrary.org\)](http://jewishvirtuallibrary.org) \*to be confirmed

## Guidance and Support in Relation to Religious Fasting

This guidance was developed to provide support to students and staff in relation to religious fasting, and its potential impact on completing assessment or other learning and teaching activity. Further advice and support can be accessed from the College Chaplaincy through their dedicated [webpage](#)

- 1.1. Religious festivals and the fasting that is associated with some of these can, for many, be an important and positive experience and celebration of and commitment to their faith. Many of the major religious festivals fall within the College's vacation period when no examinations are normally set. At other times the College will strive to take account of the dates of key festivals in setting examinations as far as it can, but the logistical issues as described in the policy can inhibit this.
- 1.2. In some years, either the main examination period or the late summer examination (resit) period will overlap, at least partially, with periods of religious fasting. The College will not be able to alter dates of the major examination periods as these are all carefully timed to accommodate the various elements of the individual degree programmes and the limited availability of examination rooms. If students have a religious fasting obligation during an examination period, they are advised to seek advice from the College Chaplaincy.
- 1.3. Some general comments and advice on religious fasting and examinations can however be offered and the following options are open to students:
  - Some students may decide not to take any particular steps and to continue with their fast as usual.
  - Some students, in consultation with their religious advisor, may consider that their examinations are sufficient justification to permit them not to fast, either just on examination days or in some cases for the whole examination period. It might be possible to undertake the period of fasting at a later time or explore if some alternative arrangement could be considered.
- 1.4. While departments may give consideration to timetabling some examinations during the fasting period in the morning, it would not be possible to achieve this for all examinations because of the logistical issues described above. The College is aware of arguments that students who are fasting for religious reasons could be disadvantaged, compared to other students, if their

examination occurs in the afternoons during the period of the fast, because the student was not permitted to eat at lunchtime. Mornings would not be affected as fasting students would have the opportunity to breakfast before dawn, so would be little different to other days. Persons who have a fasting obligation are generally aware of the need to keep hydrated and to eat well in the evenings and mornings.

- 1.5. The disadvantage arises from the changes in blood sugar, resulting from the fast, producing hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) and an inadequate supply of glucose to the brain, which can, in turn, affect a person's brain function (neuroglycopenia) including direct effects on concentration, memory, attention and other cognitive processes plus potential indirect effects on overall mood, anxiety and fatigue levels which can affect studying, revision and the examinations themselves. Those people who have a diagnosed medical condition, such as diabetes, and in certain other circumstances, are usually excused from the religious requirement to fast.
- 1.6. Individuals will inevitably differ in the extent to which they do, or do not, experience such changes, depending on their individual metabolisms. The cognitive difficulties will naturally tend to be greater later on in the day.
- 1.7. The Department of Health and Social Care provides a guide on healthy living and Ramadan which may be found at: [Healthy fasting during Ramadan - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/342222/Healthy_fasting_during_Ramadan_-_GOV.UK.pdf).
- 1.8. The College's Muslim Faith Advisor offers the following practical guidance to Muslim students with examinations in Ramadan:
  - Prepare the night before by mentally rehearsing the day ahead and note areas which may present difficulties.
  - Work out how to overcome those difficulties but try to imagine it as an ordinary day.
  - Ensure you are well rested - this may mean not attending 'tarawih' (night prayers in congregation).
  - Ensure you have 'suhur' (a pre-dawn meal) that has slow-release energy food.
  - If the exam is in the afternoon, take a short rest of 15-20 minutes around midday.
  - If you feel lethargic or irritated, refresh your 'wudu' (ritual ablution).
  - And peace on those who follow the right guidance.