



Academy Religious Observance Policy

Consultation Period:	12 th April 2017 – 26 th May 2017
Date Approved by NET:	6 th October 2017
Next Review Date:	Summer 2020

Academy Religious Observance Policy

Contents

	Page
1. Introduction	3
2. Arrangements for praying during working hours	3
3. Time required away from working place for religious observances	4
4. Leave for Religious Festivals	4
5. Religious dress code	5
6. Leave for Cultural observations	5
7. Hajj	5
8. Other	6
9. Contacts	7

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As the employer of staff in our Academies, Northern Education Trust (NET) recognises the statutory responsibilities related to employment. It is unlawful to discriminate against individuals because of their religious belief, or a similar philosophical belief. Day to day management of staff is delegated to the *Principal (*or nominated representative) and Line Managers in each Academy. Throughout this document reference is made to the responsibilities held by the Governing Body / *Principal for operational purposes. Ultimate responsibility rests with the Trust.
- 1.2 NET recognises that our Academies consist of practising members of most religions. When dealing with religious issues, it should not be assumed that any one religion will be represented by a specific ethnic group nor should it be assumed that all faith members would wish to be equally observant of their religious duties; some employees will have no religious faith, while others will be committed to a greater or less extent to a variety of religions and philosophical beliefs.
- 1.3 Whilst the Equality Act 2010 does not require employers to provide time and facilities for religious or belief observance in the workplace, reasonable efforts should be made to provide these wherever practical within the needs of the Academy. The Trust is expected to consider whether policies, rules and procedures discriminate against staff of a particular religion or belief and if so, whether reasonable changes can be made to accommodate them. *Principals should be sympathetic and give serious consideration to requests received.
- 1.4 Requests for time off for religious observance should always, where practicable, be planned in advance, with the employee giving as much notice as possible of their request although it is recognised that this is not possible with some festivals (e.g. Eid).
- 1.5 This policy was ratified by the Trustees on 6th October 2017 following consultation with Trade Unions. It will be reviewed from time to time in consultation with Trade Unions.

2. Arrangements for praying during working hours

- 2.1 Some religions require their followers to pray at specific times during the day so employees may request to take breaks at these times. The *Principal should support staff in the practice of their religion where practical whilst taking into consideration the needs of the academy. It should therefore be recognised that not all requests can be supported, e.g. if reasonable notice for such requests is not given, or if granting them would make educational delivery difficult or impossible.
- 2.2 The *Principal should hold a discussion with an employee who wishes to pray during working hours.
- 2.3 The *Principal should identify an appropriate place or dedicated room which can be used for staff to undertake their religious observances during working hours if they are required and this is practicable.

- 2.4 Some religions such as Islam require an adherent to undertake ritual washing prior to prayer. An agreement may be made between the *Principal and the employee for this facility to be available where possible.
- 2.5 If general washroom facilities are to be used, sensitivity from other employees would be expected.

3. Time required away from work for religious observances

- 3.1 Some religious adherents may request short periods away from the workplace for special prayers or observances e.g. Jumma (the Friday prayer) is a congregational prayer for Muslims which requires them to travel to their local or nearest Mosque. Similarly, there are certain days of obligation for Christians. Another example is the beginning of Shabhat during Winter months for Jews.
- 3.2 Any such requests will be considered by the *Principal based on the needs of the academy and may not always be granted. See 4.1.

4. Leave for Religious Festivals

- 4.1 Employees whose religious beliefs require the observance of festivals which fall on days which would normally count as working days will have to discuss this with the *Principal. Options available include the use of annual leave, flexible working hours or up to 3 days unpaid leave. Applying for religious leave should be done through normal annual leave or leave of absence procedures. Approval of such requests is subject to operational requirements. Please refer to the Academy Leave of Absence Policy.
- 4.2 In considering applications for religious leave, it is important to remember that:
- Leave requirements will not always fall at the same time of the year as some festivals are set following the Lunar calendar and the Solar calendar.
 - Not all employees of the same ethnic origin follow the same religion. Assumptions should not, therefore, be made as to when members of any one ethnic group may be seeking leave for religious purposes.
 - For some Muslim holy days, the precise timing can only be fixed a few days before the actual event on the confirmed sighting of the moon. This may mean that different communities observe the same festival on different days depending on their source for confirmation of sighting of the moon.
 - All Jewish holy days commence at sunset on the day before the actual day of the festival, therefore employees may wish to reach home before sunset.
- 4.3 The Trust's arrangements do not provide for paid time off to prepare for festivities or days which may be used as family celebrations which are not specified dates for a religious event.

- 4.4 If the religious ceremony or festival falls at a weekend, the time off is not transferable to the following working day.
- 4.5 In some circumstances, where the majority of employees in an academy wish to observe a religious festival, the *Principal may wish to consider school closure for those days but this must be approved by the Trust and not contravene the School Teacher's Pay and Conditions Document.

5. Religious Dress Code

- 5.1 Many religions require modesty of dress and/or the covering of the head for both male and female adherents. Some religions also have precise rules as to what is considered suitable styles of clothing for each sex.
- 5.2 NET recognises that individuals should be able to dress according to their wishes (provided that this is consistent with the standards expected of professional workers in an Academy environment), unless this is detrimental to a persons' ability to do his or her job, or is deemed unsafe or inappropriate for some other valid reason. For example, health and safety considerations of the academy should always be taken into account.

6. Leave for Cultural Observation

- 6.1 Some employees may request annual leave or unpaid leave to accommodate cultural observations e.g. independence or Republic days of their country of origin. If these occasions fall on days which would normally count as working days, staff will have to discuss this with the *Principal. Options available include annual leave, flexible working hours or unpaid leave of up to 3 days dependant on the needs of the academy.
- 6.2 There are also religious obligations in relation to birth, coming of age, marriage and death which can vary according to religion, culture and position in the family.
- 6.3 When considering requests for time off for religious observance and family responsibilities, *Principals should bear in mind the Flexible Working Policy and general guidance included in the Leave of Absence Policy.

7 Hajj

- 7.1 Any request for a substantial period of leave to carry out religious obligations for members of any religion will be considered on the same basis as requests for Hajj in the manner set out within this section.
- 7.2 The Trust recognises the difficulty which results from the academic year following the Gregorian not the Hijri calendar, which means that Hajj can fall during times when school is in session. The Trust respects that Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and is an obligation upon Muslims once in their lifetime, financial/health conditions permitting. The Trust is committed to providing high quality education whilst having a balanced approach to the religious needs of its employees. Employee requests for leave for Hajj will be considered according to the following criteria:

- 7.2.1 In order to minimise any possible disruption to colleagues and pupils, employees wishing to apply for the obligatory Hajj leave will notify the *Principal in writing by the start of Ramadan for the following Hajj.
- 7.2.2 Employees wishing to perform the obligatory Hajj may apply for a maximum of two weeks unpaid leave. In order to balance the needs of students and the need for employees to make the obligatory Hajj pilgrimage, Muslim employees may be granted Hajj leave subject to the academy's ability to release employees without an adverse impact on service delivery.
- 7.2.3 All Muslim employees will be considered with fairness irrespective of their professional status within the academy. Applications will normally only be considered for the employee's obligatory (first) Hajj or that of their partner. In exceptional circumstances requests made on compassionate grounds may also be considered by the *Principal. Permissions / requests for Umrah or non-obligatory Hajj will not be considered during school term time except on exceptional compassionate grounds.
- 7.2.4 The initial decision on whether or not to grant leave for Hajj will be made by the *Principal who will consider the written application made by the employee member.

8. Other

- 8.1 Some religions require extended periods of fasting or abstinence. Fasting usually involves having limited/no food and/or drink for a specific day or period (e.g. sunrise to sunset).
- 8.2 During such periods, employees may wish to notify the *Principal of their observances (especially in the case of fasting) as they will then understand why an employee is not eating. Lack of food may affect performance in different ways and this should be acknowledged during this period.

CONTACTS

For advice on the content of this policy please contact:

Judith Telford
HR Director
Northern Education Trust
jud.telford@northerneducationtrust.org
Tel: 07976 044539

Jessica Worthington
HR Manager
Northern Education Trust
jess.worthington@northerneducationtrust.org
Tel: 07714 245673

Helen Neary
HR Advisor
Northern Education Trust
Helen.neary@northerneducationtrust.org
Tel: 07714 245678

Zoe Strike
Assistant HR Advisor
Northern Education Trust
zoe.strike@northerneducationtrust.org
Tel: 07715 671660

Katie Rose
Assistant HR Advisor
Northern Education Trust
katie.rose@northerneducationtrust.org
Tel: 07715 655495

Employees are also encouraged to contact their trade union representative for advice and support where appropriate, and may find the guidance published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (www.equalityhumanrights.com) useful.