



BISHOP GROSSETESTE UNIVERSITY

RELIGION AND BELIEF POLICY

1. Our position statement

Bishop Grosseteste University (BGU) is an Anglican (Church of England) university founded by trustees from the Diocese of Lincoln. It is proud of its Anglican heritage and allegiance and values its identity as a space where faith is taken seriously. As a Church university, it takes particularly seriously the importance of being a place where people of all faiths and none are free to express their beliefs and to engage in respectful dialogue with those of differing views. To that end, the University has adopted the following position statement¹:

As members of the human family, we should show each other respect and courtesy. In our dealings with people of other faiths and beliefs this means exercising good will and:

- Respecting other people's freedom within the law to express their beliefs and convictions
- Learning to understand what others actually believe and value, and letting them express this in their own terms
- Respecting the convictions of others about food, dress and social etiquette and not behaving in ways which cause needless offence²
- Recognising that all of us at times fall short of the ideals of our own traditions and never comparing our own ideals with other people's practices
- Working to prevent disagreement from leading to conflict
- Always seeking to avoid violence in our relationships.

When we talk about matters of faith with one another, we need to do so with sensitivity, honesty and straightforwardness. This means:

- Recognising that listening as well as speaking is necessary for a genuine conversation
- Being honest about our beliefs and religious allegiances
- Not misrepresenting or disparaging other people's beliefs and practices

¹ The Inter Faith Network for the UK website: <http://www.interfaith.org.uk/pcode.htm> - Building Good Relations with People of Different Faiths and Beliefs.

² See further detail below for the explicit policy in this regard

- Correcting misunderstanding or misrepresentations not only of our own but also of other faiths whenever we come across them
- Being straightforward about our intentions
- Accepting that in formal inter faith meetings there is a particular responsibility to ensure that the religious commitment of all those who are present will be respected.

All of us want others to understand and respect our views. Some people will also want to persuade others to join their faith³. In a multi faith society where this is permitted, the attempt should always be characterised by self-restraint and a concern for the other's freedom and dignity. This means:

- Respecting another person's expressed wish to be left alone
- Avoiding imposing ourselves and our views on individuals or communities who are in vulnerable situations in ways which exploit these
- Being sensitive and courteous
- Avoiding violent action or language, threats, manipulation, improper inducements, or the misuse of any kind of power
- Respecting the right of others to disagree with us.

Living and working together is not always easy. Religion harnesses deep emotions which can sometimes take destructive forms. Where this happens, we must draw on our faith to bring about reconciliation and understanding. The truest fruits of religion are healing and positive. We have a great deal to learn from one another which can enrich us without undermining our own identities. Together, listening and responding with openness and respect, we can move forward to work in ways that acknowledge genuine differences but build on shared hopes and values.

2. Specific policies related to this position statement

2.1. Employment

BGU, as a Church University, has certain roles where there is a Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) for the post holder to be Christian. At present the following posts have some measure of GOR:

- The Vice Chancellor - Here the requirement as set currently by the University's Instrument and Articles is for the Vice Chancellor to be a member of a Church in sympathy with the Church of England. However, this is not in the Instrument and Articles of Government of the University and the University Council will wish to discuss whether to address this issue at a later date.

³ The University has a more detailed policy, set out below (part 2e) on Workplace Evangelisation, to make the meaning behind this section of our policy statement clearer

- The Chaplain - The Instrument and Articles of Government of the University require the Chaplain to be an ordained Anglican.

With regard to other senior posts, such as members of the Senior Leadership Team and the academic staff with responsibility for theology, each vacancy will be assessed carefully to see how far a genuine occupational requirement exists. Here the advice of the Church of England Board of Education and the views of the Dearing report will be taken as guidance as well as case law as it emerges. It is likely that there will always be a requirement for at least one member of the theology teaching staff to be a member of a Christian Church affiliated to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

All details relating to advertised posts should include the University's vision, purpose, mission and core beliefs and values, since these documents reflect the essential nature of BGU as an Anglican University. A standard question is included at interview for all positions to ensure that staff are prepared to work towards the vision and to sign up to the core beliefs and values. Evidence since this practice was introduced is that prospective employees from different faith backgrounds and people of no religious faith have had no difficulty in answering this question positively and securing employment at BGU.

2.2. Governance

The Instrument and Articles of the University require that a simple majority of members of the University Council be communicating members of the Church of England.

2.3. Dress Code

The University in general imposes no dress code on its staff and students, other than on occasions when this may have a bearing on issues of health and safety, decency or offence.

Individuals' wearing of particular items as an expression or requirement of their religious/cultural allegiance would otherwise be welcomed as the reflection of a mixed and diverse community.

Students are expected to comply with the dress code of any setting in which they are on placement. In cases where an individual requires this to be adapted or added to in some way to adhere to their own religious/cultural norms, this would be sympathetically considered in consultation with the setting concerned, recognising that placement settings offer placements voluntarily and that in some cases there might be a need to try to identify an alternative placement.

There are some roles within the University for which a level of uniform is provided for reasons of identification, protection or customer service. Again, any individual's request for this to be adapted or added to in some way so as to adhere to their own religious/cultural norms would be seriously and sympathetically considered.

2.4. Dietary Requirements

The University will consider any request for food that meets religious dietary requirements in consultation with the relevant religious groups, and as a result University catering will make reasonably appropriate provision.

2.5. Religious Observance (prayer, holy days etc)

The University will endeavour to provide suitable space for the prayers and ablutions of those desiring to practise aspects of their faith whilst resident or working/studying on campus.

Any additional or alternative facilities and support groups available to students and staff in the locality will also be made known.

The University will make reasonable accommodations for students and staff whose religious practices or holy days coincide with their work, study or examination schedules. Students and staff should inform their tutor or line manager of such needs at the beginning of the academic or leave year, or as soon as the relevant dates are available, so as to allow for consideration to be taken.

2.6. Evangelising in the Workplace

Bearing in mind the approach set out in the position statement above, we have a more explicit statement on evangelising in the work place which is included in the Staff Handbook:

“First, the University itself clearly does practise Christian evangelisation of staff and students, through the chaplaincy.

Secondly, if a member of staff wanted to start a voluntary group for workplace evangelisation of staff (e.g. an Alpha Group) the University would not necessarily oppose it. The University might allow its premises to be used for such a group; but would reserve the right not to. We would expect any such initiatives to be cleared by the Chaplaincy team first to make sure they fitted with the current chaplaincy programme.

Thirdly, however, the University would not encourage evangelisation of students by staff, except through the work of the chaplaincy. The inequalities of power in the relationship between students and staff make such evangelisation too susceptible to abuse.

Fourthly, whilst the University respects the freedom of speech of all members of staff, attempts to evangelise in the course of non-voluntary encounters, e.g. when staff have no choice but to work together, are inadvisable. If such attempts were persisted in when a colleague had made clear that they were unwelcome, there might be ground for a complaint which the University must consider.”

2.7. Maintaining Good Relations

Whilst respecting the right to freedom of expression within the law on matters of religion and belief, the University will not tolerate the expression of views that are likely to undermine good campus and/or community relations.

If any member of the University community experiences harassment, alarm, distress or hostility in relation to perceived or actual religious extremism of any sort they should seek advice from HR (for staff) or Student Advice (for students) so that the matter can be dealt with and resolved at an early stage. The reported issue will be dealt with via the appropriate procedures – for example, the Dignity Policy, the Student Disciplinary Procedure or by the police.