



Religious Observance

1. Introduction

St George's is proud of the diversity of our student population and values the contribution that our diversity brings to our community. The University recognises the importance of faith to the well-being of many of our students.

University Regulations state that students are expected to attend all classes and assessments as required by their programme. The academic calendar is built around national public holidays which accommodate the Christian calendar.

As far as is possible, the academic timetable and examinations calendar will be scheduled to avoid important religious festivals. However, the academic timetable and exams calendar cannot accommodate all the diversity of religious observance which all members of our community may wish to undertake.

If a teaching session or an examination clashes with a religious festival that a student wishes to be absent in order to observe, the University will endeavour to make adjustments to support the student. It may not be possible for all students requests to be accommodated

2. Setting the Academic Timetable and the Examinations Calendar

Establishing the academic timetable and the examinations calendar are complex tasks with many constraints. Before setting these timetables Registry will work with the Chaplaincy to identify the dates of major religious festivals for the forthcoming academic year. See Appendix A. These dates will be assigned to two different categories:

- i. Dates on which course teams will be asked to avoid timetabling exams or essential teaching sessions (red dates).
- ii. Dates which course teams should be aware of (amber dates).

The dates will be circulated to course teams with the timetabling requests alongside other important dates to be avoided (Graduation and Public Holidays).

3. Examinations

Registry will make every effort to avoid any examination clashing with the dates identified in the first category above. In the event that there is a clash the exams team will review options to see if it is possible to move the exam, if this is not possible the clash will be escalated to the Academic Registrar for review.

The exams calendar can be found on the [Exams webpage](#). Once it is published exam dates are fixed and changes are not possible.

Adjustments which can be offered for examinations

Exam security is of primary importance which means that all students are required to sit an exam at the same time. It is also important that students are given equal preparation time before an assessment to be fair to all students.

If a student wishes to observe a religious festival on a date which clashes with an examination the following adjustments can be considered:

Where there is a choice of assessment time

Where an assessment is timetabled for more than one day e.g. an OSCE, or where there is more than one sitting of a written assessment, a student may request to attend a particular sitting in order to accommodate religious observance. Students should notify the Examinations Team. Notification must:

- Be given at least **6 weeks in advance** of the religious festival.
- Be emailed to John Sanger, Head of Examinations, jsanger@sgul.ac.uk
- Include the date and specific times of the day when the student will need to observe the religious festival.

A student who is dissatisfied with the decision of the Head of Examinations can appeal to the Academic Registrar.

Deferral

Students may request a deferral of an examination that falls on a religious festival, to the next available sitting. The application form and guidance documents for Mitigating Circumstances to request a deferral can be found on the SGUL Examinations page here: [Exams \(sgul.ac.uk\)](https://www.sgul.ac.uk/exams) . In some instances, this may not be until the next academic year (and, in the event that a student fails the assessment, the next resit attempt may not be until the next academic year).

An application for Mitigating Circumstances will not usually be supported for regular worship including fasting.

Oral exams

Students may request an alteration to the time of an oral exam to accommodate religious observance. This may mean a delay in an award. Occasionally oral exams are offered by video link.

It is important to note that the solutions outlined above may not be appropriate in all cases.

Coursework submission dates will not be altered to accommodate religious festivals, students should plan to accommodate these.

4. Teaching Activities

Students should check term dates and their academic timetable as soon as these become available to identify dates where their university commitments might conflict

with a date on which they would like to undertake important religious observance. Term dates are published in advance of the academic year on the website.

A student who would like to request approval for absence from university to observe a religious festival or undertake other religious practice should make a request by email to their Course Director at least **6 weeks before the date** of the absence requested.

Course Directors will make every effort to accommodate requests and will make accommodation for those requests which fall on a category (i) (red) date identified in the calendar of major religious festival dates.

If a student fails to attend a class or other university activity without prior approval this will be treated like any other unauthorised absence. For example, the absence may be recorded in the relevant Attendance record for their programme (e.g. Longitudinal Professional Assessment for MBBS and Radiography) and may trigger concerns about professionalism and relevant committees (e.g. Professional Behaviour Process/ Student Progress Monitoring Process).

The Course Director (or nominee) will decide whether or not to approve the absence and will notify the student of the decision and the reasons for the decision.

The Course Director (or nominee) will inform the Course Administrator of the request and the outcome and the Administrator will keep a record.

Appeal

If a student is unhappy with the decision of the Course Director and wishes to appeal they should do within 5 days of receiving the decision. They should send their appeal to the Academic Registrar (or the Student EDI Officer in the Registry if the Academic Registrar is unavailable). A panel will be convened and will meet within 10 days of the receipt of appeal. This panel will be made up of at least 3 members from the following list:

- Academic Registrar
- Students Union Vice President :Education & Welfare
- Associate Dean for Widening Participation
- Dean or Deputy Dean for Students
- Head of Student Services
- a Course Director for another course
- Student EDI Officer
- Chair of the Interfaith Forum

Examples of accommodations which may be offered

The university will endeavour to accommodate requests if it is reasonable to do so. The university may need to take into account a range of issues, such as:

- Whether the festival or observance is a required aspect of the student's faith.
- Whether the amount of time off requested is compatible with the individual's training and ability to meet their learning objectives.

- Whether the accommodation would have a detrimental effect to the learning of other students.
- Whether it is practically possible for SGUL to make alternative arrangements, including consideration of resources, space and staff available.
- Whether the inter-professional mix of any student group be unduly affected.

Regular worship

Teaching will not be altered to accommodate regular worship e.g. for regular observances on a Friday. Students who would like to leave teaching sessions early or arrive late to accommodate religious observance may discuss this in advance with their tutors and where possible this will be accommodated if it does not impact on the study of others. Students must enter or leave the classroom with minimal noise or disruption.

Where practical and appropriate staff may wish to ask if there is any student who wishes to leave a session to pray or break fast.

If a student is on a placement and would like to observe Friday worship, this will need to be discussed with the relevant clinician.

Other accommodation could include:

- The choice of an earlier or later slot for a particular class
- Use of a Panopto recording to catch up on the session missed
- Relevant handouts and main points covered in the session displayed on the relevant VLE (e.g. Moodle, Study space)
- A list of resources available in the library which cover the content of the class displayed on Moodle/Study Space
- An opportunity to sit in on another session or clinic at another time.

St George's has to balance all requests with the needs of both the university and its other students and therefore the solutions outlined above may not be appropriate in all cases.

Examples of reasons why a request may not be approved

Requests which may not be approved include:

Request to alter a course assessment submission date

These requests will not be accommodated, students should manage their assessment deadlines around their religious observance.

Request to attend a pilgrimage

Pilgrimages are not considered to be a required religious observance and should be arranged outside of term time.

Request to attend a 'non-compulsory' religious festival

Students may request to attend religious festivals which are not compulsory to the practice of their faith. St George's will seek advice from the Chaplaincy regarding the particular significance of religious festivals.

Request to attend an historic event

Students may request to attend an event such as a visit to the UK by a religious leader, or perhaps a religious celebration or rally. While the University recognises that such an event might be highly significant, if it is not a compulsory religious festival St George's may not authorise the request.

Request to miss a clinical placement/ attachment

It may not be feasible to re-arrange clinics or teaching sessions. Students on clinical placements/attachments need to be aware that they may be required to work outside ordinary hours including occasional evenings or weekends.

The activity is a key requirement for completion of the course

There may be a need for a particular experience to be gained as part of the course at a set time. If a particular class, placement or activity is a key requirement for completion of the course and qualification for an award, St George's may consider that it is unable to make an accommodation.

Effect on other students

The accommodation will have an unduly detrimental effect on the learning of other students.

Practical constraints

After due consideration, it may not be practically possible for St George's to make alternative arrangements due to financial, physical or other constraints. For instance it may not be possible to re-run a practical class in a laboratory.

5. Monitoring

The Exams Team and Course Administration will keep accurate records of requests received, decisions and accommodations made and the reasons for these.

Academic Registrar
July 2023

Determination of Festival Dates for the Religious Observance Policy

1. Context

- i The primary source of guidance to the university in religious matters are the SGHFT Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Centre, who the university employ in this area.
- ii To help ensure the smooth operation of this policy, a calendar of religious festival dates is available to staff when organising curriculum delivery and supporting individual students.
- iii The calendar of religious festival dates is provided to university staff for advisory purposes only.
- iv The university acknowledges that it is impossible to create an entirely exhaustive list of all religious festival dates, students can be granted a short leave from their studies to engage in a religious festival regardless of whether it appears on the published list.

2. Setting Dates

- i An initial list of major religious festival dates will be created by the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer based on reputable online sources and common practice in other UK HEIs. This initial list of dates will be reviewed and approved by the Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Centre before adoption in principle by the University.
- ii Where possible, dates for religious festivals will be identified three academic years in advance. In cases where it is not possible to reliably identify dates three academic years in advance, the relevant member of the Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care team will determine how far in advance it is able to provide dates.
- iii Religious festival dates will be reviewed annually by the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer and the Chaplaincy and Spiritual Care Team. The review will be completed and dates submitted to the Academic Registrar by 31 January each year.

3. Categorisation of dates

- i When publishing advisory dates, they may be classified as 'Amber' or 'Red'
- ii Classification of dates in this manner does not constitute the university expressing a view on the relative importance of festivals or other practices within a religion, denomination or sect. Nor does it constitute the university expressing a view on the relative value of one religion, denomination or sect over another.
- iii Dates will be classed as 'Amber' where it is considered that a relatively small number of students are likely to wish to be granted leave or where leave is unlikely to cause significant disruption to course activities.
- iv Dates will be classed as 'Red' where it is considered that a large number of students may wish to be granted leave or where leave would cause significant disruption to course activities (eg a formal clinical examination).
- v The final classification of dates as 'Amber' or 'Red' will be at the discretion of the Academic Registrar. Determinations of significance of student numbers and/or disruption to study will be made by the Academic Registrar.