

Religion & Belief Code of Practice:

Guidance



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Introduction

The main aim of our education programmes at St George's is to ensure students learn to become excellent health professionals. The university wishes to facilitate this professionalism. The institution focuses on teaching students skills which will enable them to provide outstanding healthcare to their patients and act as competent and helpful members of a healthcare team. We believe this safeguards future patient care, as well as helping our students step into employment.

All students from each programme are required to sign an 'Entry Information Document' to state they agree to comply with St George's regulations including those concerning appropriate dress.

Where possible St George's wants all of its students to be included and achieve their potential. This 'Religion & Belief Code of Practice' outlines what reasonable accommodations the institution may offer for reasons of religious observance. Such accommodations may be requested by students undertaking healthcare work/study both within the university and while on placement.

Nevertheless students should be aware that as part of their programme, St George's trains students for the workplace. This includes understanding the need to comply with the decisions and rules of individual NHS Trusts.

Requesting that a reasonable accommodation be made

Should any student wish to request that a reasonable accommodation be made on placement, then in the first instance they should approach their year administrator who will liaise with the clinical sub-deans at the clinical attachment sites.

Where appropriate, St George's may attempt to negotiate a reasonable accommodation, but this may not always be possible.

Students must be aware that if a requested accommodation contravenes an individual Trust's own dress code, then students will be expected to abide by that Trust's decision.

In such circumstances, students should be aware that it will not always be possible, or indeed appropriate, for St George's to provide an alternative placement.

1 The importance of working with people of both sexes

1.1 Working with patients

We recognise that some students may wish to specialise in treating patients of only one sex once they qualify. However, independent of any individual's future decision, St George's must train all its students to become competent medical professionals and to reach the 'core competencies' required by their programme of study. Therefore male and female students must examine patients of both sexes during their training - this obligation extends to any individual who may act as a patient during practical examinations such as OSCEs (Objective Structured Clinical Examination).

1.2 Engaging in handshaking with patients

Communication skills are crucial to developing a good professional patient relationship. St George's examines these skills throughout clinical courses. For many patients in the UK, shaking hands is seen as an important courtesy that helps build rapport so the patient feels comfortable.

However St George makes all its students aware that patients may have different ways of greeting and teaches its students how to negotiate these expectations effectively – this includes students who may not wish to shake hands for reasons of religious observance.

Refusing a handshake is not a disciplinary matter but students must always be mindful of not causing offence to a patient. If a patient offers their hand, and a student wishes to offer an alternative greeting they must handle this matter tactfully and sensitively.

1.3 Clinical skills practice

Clinical skills training involves the examination of student peers in preparation for patient examination. This teaching is important in helping students to gain basic clinical examining skills before they are asked to examine real patients. Students are not required to act as 'patients' to be examined, but it is a cooperative and generous gesture to fellow students should they do so.

Mixed sex groups of students are taught together.

However, St George's recognises that some students will prefer not to examine a student of the other sex, or be examined by a student of the other sex. Therefore a separate cubicle is provided as an 'opt in' resource for any student who wishes to conduct a clinical skills examination in a single sex pair, before then returning once again to the main group. This arrangement applies to the following programmes and students:

Programme	Student type
Interprofessional Foundation Programme	biomedical, medical, health care science, physiotherapy & radiography students
MBBS4 Year 1	medical students
MBBS5 Year 1 and 2	medical students
T Year clinical skills sessions	medical students
PgDip PA Studies	physicians associate students

1.4 Request for a reasonable accommodation be made

Should any student have a particular concerns about the requirements for participating in peer examination during the clinical skills class, that student should contact his or her teacher privately to discuss the situation. - The relevant email addresses will be provided in that student's course handbook.

1.5 Working with colleagues

Multidisciplinary teams include health professionals of both sexes. Both male and female students must be prepared to work with fellow students and qualified health professionals of both sexes while on placement.

2 Department of Health Uniforms and workwear policy

2.1 'Bare below the elbows' DH policy

In 2007 the Department of Health (DH) published its document 'Uniforms and workwear: An evidence base for developing local policy'*. This policy was updated in 2010.

This document has become widely known as the 'bare below the elbows' policy and it aims to help combat infection and improve patient confidence in the cleanliness of the healthcare environment.

The policy emphasises the vital importance of hand washing as part of infection control. All healthcare individuals who come into contact with patients need to wash their hands between patients; and additionally, an individual may need to wash their hands several times when examining or treating the same patient.

When involved in direct patient care activity, all healthcare professionals need to be bare below the elbow. Any sleeve must be able to be rolled or pulled back and kept securely in place during hand-washing and direct patient care activity.

THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THIS RULE.

*This document may be viewed by pasting the following web address into your browser:
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/pr od_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/documents/digitalasset/dh_078435.pdf

2.2 Variation in dress codes

It is important to understand that the development of any dress code is **DECIDED LOCALLY**. Therefore such dress codes remain the responsibility of each individual NHS organisation and as such, students need to be aware that local dress codes may vary between placements. Dress permitted at one placement may not be permitted at another, depending on decisions made by the clinical managers and the local infection prevention and control team.

Each NHS trust has its own regulations. That Trust's clinical managers and infection prevention and control team decide what dress is appropriate. Students should be aware that St George's cannot recommend any exemption to an NHS Trust's own dress code.

3 Forearms

3.1 Sleeve length

St George's is aware that for cultural or religious reasons, during times when individuals are not directly treating patients, some students may not wish to expose their forearms.

Some – but not all – NHS trusts have uniforms which include provision for sleeves that can be worn full or three-quarter length when staff are not engaged in direct patient care activity. Students are required to comply with local regulations with regard to the permitted length of sleeves.

On campus

If full length sleeved uniforms are not available, sometimes disposable over-sleeves, elasticated at the elbow and wrist, may be used.

These must be put on and discarded in the same way as disposable gloves. Strict procedures for washing hands and wrists as outlined by the Department of Health (see point 2.1 of this document) must still be observed. Such sleeves may be worn on top of scrubbed arms after usual hand washing techniques have been followed. Disposable sleeves must be changed between patients and sometimes several times with one patient, and hand washing techniques stipulated by the Department of Health must be observed.



On placement

Some Trusts may permit students to wear disposable sleeves.

4 Scrubbing in

4.1 Surgical dress

Students are expected to learn and then demonstrate the correct manner in which to don surgical dress. Donning surgical dress will involve exposing the arms while washing which may be problematic for some female students, if scrubbing is supervised by a male.

4.2 Request for a reasonable accommodation

The institution is aware that for cultural or religious reasons some females may wish to be observed by a female staff member when scrubbing in. However, students need to be aware that it may not always be reasonable for the Trust to make such an accommodation and provide a female member of staff to supervise such scrubbing in.

5 Alcohol-based hand gel

5.1 Muslims and alcohol based hand gel

When formulating their uniforms and workwear policy the DH sought advice from the 'Muslim Spiritual Care Provision' in the NHS (MSCP) on alcohol- based gel. The MSCP advised that as alcohol- based hand gel contains synthetic alcohol, it does not fall within the Muslim prohibition against natural alcohol (made from fermented fruit or grain). Alcohol-based gel is used widely in Islamic countries within health care settings. It is permissible for Muslims to use such gels.

6 The Hijab: Headscarf

6.1 Wearing the hijab

The institution is aware that for cultural or religious reasons some females may choose to cover their hair, ears and neck. Some female Muslims may choose to do this by wearing a headscarf (hijab) which covers the hair, ear and neck but which exposes the face.

On campus

It is permitted to wear a hijab on campus.

On placement

It is permitted to wear a hijab on placement.

Some Trusts may permit students to wear a theatre head-covering to appropriately cover the hair, ears and neck but which exposes the face, when in surgical theatre.



7 The Turban

7.1 Wearing the turban



The institution is aware that for cultural or religious reasons some male Sikh students may wish to wear a turban.

On campus

It is permitted to wear a turban on campus.

On placement

It is permitted to wear a turban on placement.

Some Trusts permit students to wear a theatre head-covering to appropriately cover the turban, when in surgical theatre.

8 The Yarmulke

8.1 Wearing the yarmulke

The institution is aware that for cultural or religious observance some Jewish male students may wish to wear the yarmulke – skullcap.

On campus

It is permitted to wear a yarmulke on campus.

On placement

It is permitted to wear a yarmulke on placement.

Some Trusts permit students to wear a theatre head-covering to appropriately cover the yarmulke, when in surgical theatre.



9 Face veil

9.1 Niqab and Burka

As part of their religious or cultural observance, some female Muslims may wish to wear a half face veil -a niqab- or a full face veil- a burka.

On campus

Learning to communicate should be part of the skill set to be achieved by all healthcare professionals. St George's expects all its students to demonstrate the same high standard of communication skills.

All St George's students are required to expose their face in situations where this is important for communication with another person. This means that a student's face should be exposed in the following situations:

- in all clinical areas
- when working with teachers
- when working with other students
- when examining a patient as part of an Objective Structured Practical Examinations (OSCE)
- for identification purposes including entry to examinations and the library.

During large lectures, when there is no expectation of interaction with each and every member of the class, students may cover their faces with a niqab or burka.

However, if it is considered that communication would be hampered in a learning environment -for instance if facial cues are needed to understand a student's contribution during small group discussions, role play, clinical skills or communication skills etc, then staff may request that an individual remove their face veil.

It is **NOT** permitted to wear a niqab or a burka or any facial covering in **SECURE** areas of the university. A secure area is defined as any area that is managed by access control. Any individual who needs to use their security pass to gain access, may reasonably assume they have entered a secure area.

On placement

For security reasons, all students are expected to comply with each individual Trust's dress code policy regarding the niqab or burka.



10 Loose dress

10.1 The jilbab and the chador

As part of their religious or cultural observance, in order to avoid showing the contours of their body, some female Muslims may wish to wear a jilbab - a loose dress from neck to ankle which covers the arms including the wrists or a chador (a full-body cloak).

On campus

It is permitted to wear the jilbab or the chador as long as this does not impede:

- direct patient contact
- working with teachers
- working with other students
- examining a patient as part of an Objective Structured Practical Examinations (OSCE).

On placement

Students are expected to comply with each individual Trust's dress code policy regarding the chador and jilbab.



11 The Kara: Steel Bangle

11.1 The Kara



Both male and female Sikhs wear the Kara; a sacred bracelet made of steel. It is a religious requirement to wear the Kara. Sikhs are not permitted to remove the Kara.

On campus

It is permitted to wear the Kara on campus.

Sikh students should ensure that the Kara is pushed up the arm and secured in place with tape for hand washing and during direct patient care activity.

On placement

Some Trusts may allow students to tape up their Kara when in surgical theatre.



12 The Kirpan: Ceremonial Sword

12.1 The Kirpan

A Sikh may be uninitiated or initiated. Initiated male and initiated female Sikhs are required to wear the Kirpan (a ceremonial sword). The Kirpan is carried in a sheath attached to a cloth belt. It is normally worn discreetly under clothes and most people would be unaware that a Sikh was carrying a Kirpan. The size of the Kirpan may differ depending on the personal taste of the initiated Sikh, but may be only a few inches.



Under the 1988 Criminal Justice Act, the Kirpan is **NOT** classified as an offensive weapon and therefore Sikhs carrying the Kirpan are exempt from prosecution under the Offensive Weapons Act 2008.

On campus

It is permitted to wear the Kirpan on campus.

St George's recognises that initiated Sikhs have a right to wear the Kirpan. However the institution is also mindful that not everyone is familiar with the full significance of the Kirpan. Therefore as a compromise and in order to avoid undue alarm to others, when on campus, wearers of the Kirpan must ensure this item is worn discreetly. This means that the Kirpan should remain out of sight by such methods as:

- tucking it inside clothes
- tucking it inside a belt and ensuring the wearer's clothes cover the belt.

Any student wearing a Kirpan should also ensure it is secured so it cannot be easily drawn.

On placement

If the student needs to scrub in to take part in surgical theatre then some Trusts may require that student to tape the Kirpan to their body.

13 Suitable clothing for paramedic training

13.1 Paramedic training

Students need to be aware that paramedic skills training is quite physically demanding and is frequently carried out on the floor – to simulate the circumstances in which many patients are found.

On campus

During skills sessions students will need to be able to move freely in a kneeling position and to move safely from a kneeling to a standing position whilst carrying equipment. For reasons of health and safety, students must wear flat, closed toe shoes or boots, loose fitting trousers and a (modest) t shirt/ sweat shirt (students are issued with ambulance uniform trousers and a student paramedic polo shirt which partially fulfil these requirements). However, students are free to wear head coverings, a long sleeve top under their polo shirt or a short skirt over their trousers. Students may not wear long skirts or long, heavily flared trousers, both of which represent a trip hazard when moving from a kneeling to a standing position.

On placement

Students will be required to adhere to ambulance service uniform policy when on placement. This is a health and safety requirement dictated by the sometimes very hazardous environment in which paramedics are expected to operate.

14 Suitable clothing for laboratory work

14.1 Laboratory coats

Inside laboratories, students must wear laboratory coats over their clothes and must be able to close the coat up completely.

14.2 Trailing clothing

Apart from shoes, students must not wear any clothing that touches the floor, as this could potentially pick up contamination from the floor surface, dangle in chemical or biological hazards, or become a trip hazard.

14.3 Personal protective equipment

Individuals working in laboratories must be able to wear the full range of personal protective equipment such as gloves, eye protection such as safety glasses or face shields, on occasion full face masks and in some areas a filtering face mask. Head wear must allow individuals full frontal and peripheral vision at all times and must allow for communication in an unobstructed manner especially during emergency situations or when alarms are sounding.



15 Identification checks

15.1 ID security checks

St George's appreciate that for religious or cultural reasons, some female students may choose to wear a facial covering when travelling around the campus.

However it is important that all students realise that from time to time the institution may wish to verify the identity of individual in order to:

- allow access to premises
- for the purposes of taking an examination
- to carry out a security check.

This is usually done by carrying out a visual check against photographic ID issued by St George's.

In order to verify the identity of an individual female student with a facial covering, St George's will try to make available a female member of staff to perform this visual check in a private room. However as female students are expected to unveil for teaching sessions in mixed groups, if a female staff member is not available, then if necessary, female students must be prepared to unveil for a male member of staff performing any such check.

15.2 Obtaining a Photo ID

For reasons similar to those outlined above some, female students may be uncomfortable having their photograph taken for their ID card. In this situation, it may be appropriate to have a female member of staff available to take the photo in a private room (if available).

If a female photographer is not available, an alternative may be that the member of staff or student with a facial covering provides a passport photo, which is then verified by a female member of staff in a private room and that this photo is then scanned onto the ID card.

16 Taking part in procedures

16.1 Taking part in abortive procedures/human embryo/fertility treatments

If a student does not wish to participate in any attachments which use abortive procedures on human foetuses and other human embryo and fertility treatments they can ask for a reasonable accommodation to be made under the '**Conscientious Objection and Educational Participation Policy**' *.

*-This document is available for viewing on the equality and diversity page of the website under the section 'religion' under the heading useful documents.-

<http://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-st-George's/planning-secretariat-office/secretariat-office/equality-and-diversity/religion-belief>.

16.2 Blood transfusions

Members of some religions such as Jehovah Witnesses are prohibited from receiving blood transfusions. However in order to meet core competencies, any student training as a clinician at St George's will be expected to take part in procedures that involve taking blood from others –such training may not be avoided.

17 Changes to the academic or exam timetable

17.1 'Religious Observance and the Academic Timetabling' policy

If a student wishes to request a change to their academic timetable for reasons of religious observance they should submit an application under the 'Religious Observance and the Academic Timetabling Policy'*. This policy outlines under which circumstances the institution may be able to offer reasonable adjustments.

*-This document is available for viewing on the equality and diversity page of the website under the section 'religion' under the heading useful documents.-

<http://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-st-George's/planning-secretariat-office/secretariat-office/equality-and-diversity/religion-belief>.

17.2 'Religious Observance and Exams' policy

If any student wishes to make a request for a change to be made to their exams timetable for reasons of religious observance then they need to apply under the 'Religious Observance and the Exams Policy'*. This document outlines under which circumstances the institution may be able to offer reasonable adjustments.

*-This document is available for viewing on the equality and diversity page of the website under the section 'religion' under the heading useful documents.-

<http://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-st-George's/planning-secretariat-office/secretariat-office/equality-and-diversity/religion-belief>.

18 Organising and event and freedom of speech

18.1 'Promoting Good Campus Relations: Policy on Events and Meetings'

St George's is committed to creating a campus environment characterised by good relations between staff and students of different backgrounds. The institution aims to ensure that people from all backgrounds are afforded equivalent protection.

Discrimination, intolerance and violence have no place on campus. Therefore the right to freedom of speech must be balanced with the need to protect people from abuse, including from the incitement of hatred. Thus all expressions of freedom of speech must be within the constraints of the law. Any students organising an event should familiarise themselves with the document 'Promoting Good Campus Relations: Policy on Events and Meetings'*.

*-This document is available for viewing on the equality and diversity page of the website under the section 'religion' under the heading useful documents.-

<http://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-st-George's/planning-secretariat-office/secretariat-office/equality-and-diversity/religion-belief>.

18.2 Inviting speakers

Anyone inviting a speaker needs to ensure they do so in accordance with the guidance contained within the document 'Promoting Good Campus Relations: Policy on Events and Meetings'.

Additionally event organisers must ensure that all speakers read and sign the 'Guidance for all External Speakers and External Visitors'* prior to the event.

*-This document is available for viewing and can be downloaded from the equality and diversity page of the website under the section 'religion' under the heading useful documents.- <http://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-st-George's/planning-secretariat-office/secretariat-office/equality-and-diversity/religion-belief>.

18.3 'Shout outs'

Any student 'shout outs'- announcements after lectures- must be made in compliance with the 'protocol for 'shout outs'*.

*-This document is available for viewing on the equality and diversity page of the website under the section 'religion' under the heading useful documents.- <http://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-st-George's/planning-secretariat-office/secretariat-office/equality-and-diversity/religion-belief>.

19 Multi-faith and quiet contemplation (MFQC) rooms

19.1 Location of the MFQCR rooms

St George's has three multifaith and quiet contemplation rooms. These are situated together in Jenner Wing, 1st Floor, by staircase 20.

19.2 'Protocol for the multi-faith and quiet contemplation room'

The MFQCR is in a **SECURE** area of the university and only **CURRENT** students/university staff may use the rooms and must do so in accordance with the 'Protocol for the Multi-Faith and Quiet Contemplation Room'*.

*-This document is available for viewing on the equality and diversity page of the website under the section 'religion' under the heading useful documents.- <http://www.sgul.ac.uk/about-st-George's/planning-secretariat-office/secretariat-office/equality-and-diversity/religion-belief>.

19.3 Prayer needs of admission's candidates

Registry will ensure another room is set aside for all admission candidates to use in between admissions interviews should they wish to pray.

19.4 Interfaith Forum

St George's has an Interfaith Forum. This group is made up of staff and student representatives and reports directly to the Equality and Diversity Committee. The aim of the Interfaith Forum is to:

- promote good interfaith relationships on campus
- promote understanding between people of different faiths and those of no faith
- act as a formal conduit for information on religion and belief and help communicate with all staff and students on faith-related issues
- plan and run interfaith events as part of the Equality & Diversity Committee's Calendar of Events
- ensure the multi-faith and quiet contemplation rooms are available to be used by all members of the university and help resolve any issues related to the use of the multifaith and quiet contemplation rooms.

20 Food

20.1 Food on campus

People with special dietary needs are welcome to bring in their own food with them. St George's does not provide Kosher food. Halal food is available on campus at 'Eddie Wilsons', the student café, which displays a certificate notifying customers that their meat is Halal in origin. The school shop does not specify whether their meat is halal or not. The 'Marks and Spencer's shop does not sell Halal meat.

20.2 Food on placement

If any student has special dietary requirements due to religious observance then the student must be prepared to make their own arrangements with regards to food. Placements will not be changed because of an individual's dietary requirements.

21 Keeping a record of each student's request

21.1 Monitoring

All programme administrators will keep a record of all student requests for religious accommodations to be made on that student's file. This information will include:

- the student's programme
- the student's religion or belief
- the nature of the accommodation requested
- if the accommodation was made, how so
- if not, why not – so as to record the 'objective justification' to making such an accommodation should the institution receive a legal challenge.

Anonymised monitoring information will be supplied annually to the Equality & Diversity Committee on request.

With special thanks to all St George's students who agreed to be photographed to help illustrate this guidance.

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