

ASSESSMENT FLEXIBILITY POLICY for RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE

1. Scope of the Policy

This document sets out the following:

- Responsibilities of students with regard to their studies (Section 3)
- The type of religious observance that will be considered for flexibility concerning formal assessment at the University (Section 4.1)
- The type of religious authority or faith leader from whom the University will accept supporting evidence as to the necessity of the student's assessment flexibility needs (Section 4.2)
- The type of supporting evidence required by the University (Section 4.3)
- The type of assessments covered by this document (Section 4.4)
- Assessment flexibility options (Section 5)

This policy does cover situations where a student is studying for a module and is fully expecting to complete the required assessments within the University timescales but a religious event beyond his/her control (for example, which necessitates participation in collective worship or attendance away from the University) prevents him/her taking the assessment alongside the rest of the student body.

This policy does NOT cover a situation whereby a student feels that, due to their beliefs, he/she will not be able to adequately prepare for assessments. In such a case other alternatives such as leave of absence should be discussed with the Associate Dean of Teaching (ADT), or ADT's nominee). Assessment flexibility as detailed in this policy is not normally appropriate in these circumstances. This policy also does not cover events which are arranged by the student, their family or friends: e.g. weddings. Assessments which might be missed due to funerals of close family members or friends should be discussed with the Personal Tutor in the first instance and dealt with under the Impaired Performance procedures.

2. Background to the Policy

Preservation of the academic rigour and integrity of a Loughborough University degree is paramount. The University recognises the important role which religious belief plays in the life of many students and its legal responsibilities in this area.

3. Student Responsibility

The personal responsibilities of the student themselves underpin this policy and the student is under obligation to discuss the possibility of missed assessment with the Associate Dean of Teaching (ADT), (or ADT's nominee) as soon as they are aware it could be a possibility.

Before requesting Assessment Flexibility options, the student is expected to seek special dispensation from their religious leader to fulfil their religious commitments at another time and consequently take the assessment as scheduled.

It is anticipated that significant religious events will usually be known to students well in advance of the need for assessment flexibility. University exam periods are published at least 18 months in advance and students are expected to alert their School to the possibility of a clash well prior to the affected examination period or assessment deadline. However, the University acknowledges that in some cases there may be a relatively short period of notice of the precise timing of a particular event or festival. The student should, however, contact his/her School as soon as they are aware that assessment flexibility may be a possibility.

Requests from students for assessment flexibility will be considered on a case by case basis and the student will normally be expected to provide all necessary information regarding the reason(s) why flexibility is necessary; full details of any relevant religious events, information about the nature of their faith and a supporting document from an appropriate religious authority.

Students should be aware that the decision to seek Assessment Flexibility may result in them having to take assessment at a deferred time and that, consequently, any reassessment, progression or graduation may take place later than for the majority of their cohort. Students are expected to realise the implications of seeking Assessment Flexibility and should accept that such flexibility could impact the timescale of their studies.

4. Definitions

4.1 Religious Observance

- "Religion or belief is defined as being any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief. This does not include any philosophical or political belief unless it is similar to religious belief."¹ It will be for the Academic Registrar to decide whether particular circumstances are covered by this policy.
- Religious Observance is defined as the requirement of some religions, faiths and belief systems for followers to observe certain dates by attendance at collective worship or some form of abstinence or ritual.
- The University understands that not all individuals follow their faith in the same way and so blanket decisions as to what would be suitable for one religious group may not, in practice, be appropriate.

4.2 Religious Authorities

- In order for the University to make a decision as to the necessity of flexibility in an individual case it will be necessary to consult a suitable religious authority. This should be a person of standing within the religion, faith or belief system who has known the student, ideally for several years, and can comment on the student's past religious practice.

¹ *Religion or Belief and the Workplace: Putting the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 into Practice*, (ACAS: 2005)

- The religious authority should not be related to the student.
- The student should approach the highest suitable religious authority (this could be, for example, a priest, imam or rabbi to whom the student is well known).

4.3 Supporting Evidence

- In order for the University to make a decision as to the necessity of a student's assessment flexibility, supporting documentation will be required. This will usually be in the form of a case for support from a relevant religious authority (see 4.2) explaining that the student needs to be granted assessment flexibility due to their past religious practice, the importance of the religious event, and the potential impact of this event upon the student's assessment.
- Supporting evidence should include:
 - o The title and role of the religious authority
 - o A brief statement explaining how long the religious authority has known the student; how the current religious event fits with the student's past religious practice (i.e. that they have attended/observed it for the past x years); the importance of the religious event within the religion (e.g. is it observed by all members of the religion, faith or belief system or only by some?).
 - o An indication of why the student cannot fulfill their religious commitment at another time and consequently take the assessment as scheduled (see 5 below).

4.4 Assessments

- Assessment is defined by the University as academic work (essays, coursework assignments, examinations, etc.) for which marks are awarded. This Policy covers all types of assessment. Further information can be found at <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/students/handbook/exams/>

5. Assessment Flexibility Options

Before students explore assessment flexibility options, they are expected to seek dispensation from their religious leader to fulfil their religious commitments at another time and consequently take the assessment as scheduled. If this cannot be achieved, the following options are available for consideration.

The following sections set out the procedures for the various types of assessment.

5.1 Examination Flexibility Options

- If a student meets the above criteria, the School, with advice from the Academic Registry if required, is requested to consider offering the student flexibility.
- Requests for flexibility relating to the period immediately prior to an exam will not normally be permitted; preparation for assessments should be a continuous process throughout the whole semester and as such other commitments immediately prior to an exam will not be seen as grounds to request flexibility.
- The final decision on the level of flexibility offered is usually left to School discretion (in discussion with the Academic Registry) in relation to the best interests of the student. Two forms of special arrangement will normally be considered:

1. *Defer First Sitting of an exam to the SAP or next available time (e.g. the following academic year). (Preferred option)*
2. *Undertake the exam off-campus at the same time as the rest of their cohort if the student is required to be away from Loughborough at the time of the examination and if suitable invigilation arrangements can be made. Note: The student will be responsible for bearing any costs incurred.*

5.1.1 The Examination Flexibility Procedure

- AT THE EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY (i.e. prior to publication of the timetable) the student should discuss the possibility of missed examinations with the Associate Dean of Teaching (ADT), (or ADT's nominee).
- The student should then obtain a communication from their academic School, Associate Dean of Teaching (ADT) or (ADT's nominee) expressing their support (or otherwise) of the application, including an indication of the alternative examination arrangements
- Should the academic School feel that the applicant has not acted in a responsible manner in terms of their organisation and communication (see Section 3) then the School may seek advice from the Academic Registry at this stage. The student may request to meet with the Associate Dean of Teaching (ADT), or ADT's nominee) to discuss their application.
- The student should obtain all necessary supporting evidence (see Section 4.3).
- The academic School should then contact the Student Office to progress the application – ensuring that all available supporting evidence is supplied. The Student Office will not pursue students for further evidence and, should the supplied evidence be insufficient, the request will be rejected at this stage.
- Once approved by the Academic Registrar, the student's School will be able to offer exam flexibility within the framework outlined in para 5.1 above.

5.2 Coursework Flexibility

5.2.1 Coursework Test Flexibility

- If the student meets the above eligibility criteria , the School, with advice from the Academic Registry if required, is requested to consider offering the student flexibility.
- The final decision on the level of flexibility is usually left to School discretion (in discussion with the Academic Registry) in relation to the best interests of the student.
- If a student is asking to miss attendance at an event that is essential for assessment purposes (e.g. a coursework test, presentation, or lab-based work that will result in an assessed piece of coursework), the School is encouraged to offer the event on a different occasion or assess the student in a different way. However, it is understood that in some circumstances this may not be practical and that it may not be possible to offer flexibility, even when the criteria have been met.

5.2.2 Coursework Flexibility

- The majority of coursework assignments are provided to the students early in each semester. The student is expected to proactively manage their time effectively to

allow them to engage in the work necessary to complete the coursework assignment prior to any absence from University.

- Requests for flexibility relating to the period immediately prior to a coursework assignment hand in date will not normally be supported by the University; completion of coursework should be a continuous process throughout the whole semester and as such other commitments immediately prior to a coursework deadline will not be seen as grounds to request flexibility.
- In cases where the coursework assignment is provided to the student with a very short deadline (e.g. submission one week later) and the student meets the eligibility criteria outlined in Section 4, School flexibility in relation to hand in deadlines may be requested and agreed with, in line with current School deadline flexibility practices.
- If the deadline falls on a day of significance in their religion, the student should plan to submit it in advance and, if necessary, make special arrangement with their School to do so.

5.2.3 Coursework Flexibility Procedure

- AT THE EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY the student should discuss the possibility of problematic coursework assessments with the Associate Dean of Teaching (ADT), (or ADT's nominee).
- The student should then obtain communication from their academic School (Associate Dean of Teaching (ADT), (or ADT's nominee) expressing their support (or otherwise) of the application, including an indication of the alternative assessment arrangements
- Should the academic School feel that the applicant has not acted in a responsible manner in terms of their organisation and communication (see Section 3) then the School may seek advice from the Academic Registry at this stage. The student may request to meet with the Associate Dean of Teaching (ADT) (or ADT's nominee) to discuss their application.
- The student should obtain all necessary supporting evidence (see Section 4.3).
- The academic School should then contact the Student Office to progress the application – ensuring that all available supporting evidence is supplied. The Student Office will not pursue students for further evidence and, should the supplied evidence be insufficient, the request will be rejected at this stage.
- Once approved by the Academic Registrar, the student's School will be able to offer coursework flexibility in accordance with paragraph 5.2.1 and 5.1.1.