

Appendix S: Religion and Belief Policy

Name of Policy Writer/Amendments	Date Written & agreed / Amended	Approved by	Review Date
S McKenzie	July 2017	Academic Board	July 2018

Religion and Belief: Equality Policy for Students

1. This policy provides guidance on how to meet the needs of students, with respect to religion and belief. It is not intended as a comprehensive policy; rather it addresses some of the key issues that may arise in this context.
2. Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) recognises that the spiritual and moral systems that religions and beliefs offer can often be of fundamental importance to the wellbeing of students. NSCD recognises that religious practices such as dress, diet and prayer can be an integral part of religious life. It is important that, where reasonably practicable, we try to meet the needs of students from all religious backgrounds, and also of students with no religious affiliation. It is also important to be clear when the needs of students with religious beliefs may conflict with core elements of the training or the needs of others and therefore cannot be accommodated.

The History and Ethos of Performing Arts Training at CDD

3. NSCD is an affiliate of the Conservatoire for Dance and Drama which is a secular, Higher Education Institution composed of eight independent, affiliated schools that pride themselves on their long-standing commitment to the principles of equality and diversity. Our commitment to religious equality is integral to our identity and heritage.
4. The Conservatoire does not have any religious affiliation or endorse any particular denomination or faith. The secular, liberal values that are held by Conservatoire schools are as relevant today as they were at the founding of the first schools to provide performing arts training, LAMDA in 1861 and RADA in 1904. We are committed to providing an inclusive learning and working environment where students and staff of all religions and none, can thrive.
5. NSCD has a rich mix of students from a wide variety of countries and from different cultural and religious backgrounds. It is this diversity and complexity that contributes to our ability to offer world class performing arts training.
6. The central aim of our training is to prepare students for a successful, long standing career in contemporary dance. Our students will be required to learn practical and technical skills that express the widest possible range of experience, views and beliefs. Students (according to the arts discipline they are studying) will need to be willing to portray a character or a role of any gender, race or faith; human and non- human. Classes, rehearsal and performance may involve touch and other forms of physical contact. It is vital that students who are offered and accept a place at NSCD accept that these liberal, secular principles are fundamental to training for a successful career in the performing arts.

Policy Framework

7. This policy covers any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief, but does not ordinarily cover political belief.
8. There is no exhaustive definition of these beliefs, but in a recent legal case it was determined that in order to be protected by law, a belief must be "cogent, serious and worthy of respect in a democratic society".
9. The legal instruments that relate to religion and belief equality for students are:
 - The Equality Act 2010
 - The Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006

- The Human Rights Act 1998

10. This policy follows and reinforces the equality provisions in the Conservatoire's Equality Action Plan, 2012-15 and other equality and diversity guidelines, affiliate schools' Student Code of Practice and policies on Harassment and Bullying policies.

Freedom of Thought, Conscience and Religion

11. NSCD places a high value on open and reasoned debate and recognises the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. We also have a responsibility to promote pluralism and tolerance and will seek to intervene in instances where manifestations of a belief constitute harassment or create conflict that goes beyond open and reasoned debate.
12. Religious belief will not be used to justify discriminatory behaviour and instances of this nature will be dealt with under schools' disciplinary procedures.

Religious Dress

13. Students need to recognise that in performing arts training, certain forms of dress will be required for one or more of the following reasons: health and safety, ease of movement, enactment of a role, tradition and custom in a particular art form. NSCD will make every effort to address issues where religion and belief come into play (for example, modesty of dress or wearing a religious symbol) and reach a mutually acceptable solution on a case by case basis. Students will not be asked to wear anything which makes them feel uncomfortable for religious or other reasons. However, students need to understand there is likely to be little room for adaptation in the costume/clothing required in performing certain roles in a dance performance and that health and safety will be given priority over the need for religious expression.

Recruitment and Selection

14. Students' religious affiliation is not monitored at the admissions stage or at any other stage of the student life cycle. As the Conservatoire does not currently monitor religious affiliation, we have no data to indicate whether there are any differences in the likelihood in securing a place at a Conservatoire school or in educational outcomes.
15. Religious discrimination in the recruitment and selection of students will not be tolerated and any allegations of this nature will be fully investigated, according to the current procedures for unfair practice in individual affiliate schools.

Timetables, Rehearsal Schedule and Work Placements in NSCD Training

16. NSCD has a busy timetable which has been designed to ensure that teaching and learning requirements are delivered efficiently and effectively within the available time and space. For these reasons, there is often little, if any room for the timetable to accommodate the diversity of religious observance requirements. For example, in NSCD our normal teaching day runs from 9am to 5pm from Monday to Friday – with some extra-curricular evening workshops or seminars. We understand that there may be certain occasions when a student will wish to be absent due to religious observance. This will be treated sympathetically but it is expected that this will not be a common occurrence and students should be aware that requests to miss a compulsory class, rehearsal or tutorial can be refused by staff.

Performances, Tours and Work Placements

17. In the past, theatres and other performing arts venues in the UK observed a broadly Christian tradition and were closed on Sundays and other Christian festivals such as Christmas and Easter. This is no longer the case and public performances will occasionally take place on any day of the week and at any time of the year including Bank Holidays. Since our students are being trained for a professional career as performers, they will be expected to work on any day of the year and will need to accept that there is little, if any room for acknowledgment of religious festivals. Our training reflects this and there will be occasions where students are expected to rehearse or perform on any day of the week, including weekends, religious festivals and bank holidays.
18. This is also true for students on work placements and on tour. Students requiring leave of absence from these activities on religious grounds should discuss this and **request permission from The Head of Performance in line with the *Authorised Absence Procedure***, with the understanding that it may not be possible to grant permission for this.

Harassment

19. Harassment and discrimination of students on the grounds of religion, belief or non-belief will not be tolerated and will be dealt with as a disciplinary matter. Harassment is defined in law as “*unwanted conduct ... which has the purpose or effect of either violating the claimant's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them*”.
20. Harassment on the grounds of religion or belief can occur for a variety of reasons, for example:
- On the grounds of a person's belief or non-belief;
 - On the grounds of the belief or non-belief of someone with whom they associate;
 - The decision to join or leave, express or not express a particular faith;
 - Because they have changed or renounced their religious/belief allegiance.

Implementation

21. **Responsibilities:** Responsibility for the implementation of this policy is held with staff and any other individuals associated with the functions of NSCD.
22. The Principal, **Deputy Principal** and Heads of Department have a responsibility to raise the profile of this policy and to ensure that all our staff and students are aware its contents and requirements. Further guidance is available from the Conservatoire's Equality and Diversity Committee who take responsibility for ensuring that issues relating to equality are appropriately represented in the decision-making processes of the Conservatoire and its affiliate schools'.
23. **Complaints:** with regard to any complaints of discrimination, based on the provisions outlined in this policy, students should follow the procedures described in the student handbooks of NSCD.
24. This policy does not give an exhaustive list of equality issues relating to religion and belief. If further guidance is needed, contact the Principal of NSCD or the **Equality and Diversity Manager at lois.keith@cdd.ac.uk**
25. The Conservatoire gratefully acknowledges University College London's *Equality Policy for Students on Religion and Belief*, written by Sarah Guise, Head of Equalities and Diversity <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/academic-manual/part-5/religion-belief-equality>