

**STANDARDS OF DRESS AND
RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE**



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All information contained in this prospectus was correct at the time of going to print in November 2017.

1. INTRODUCTION

Plymouth University (PU) has developed a Policy for Religious Observance in Teaching, Learning and Assessment which describes the University's commitment to accommodate religious observance on campus and to consider adjustments to working and learning practices wherever reasonably possible in order to accommodate a more diverse community.

All Plymouth University Schools of Medicine and Dentistry (PU PSMD) students are required to sign a 'School Student Agreement', which includes reference to appropriate standards of dress.

Students from the majority of PU PSMD programmes will undertake placements with NHS Trusts and other employers. Students should follow the minimum standards of dress set out in section 4 of this document, and should also observe local policy on dress code and other matters related to religious or cultural norms when attending placements.

PU PSMD policy is aligned to the Department of Health policy, and the policy determined by the partner NHS Trust, Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust (PHNT). The majority of medical and healthcare student placements are arranged within PHNT, and the majority of placements for BDS and Dental Therapy and Hygiene students are provided within the Dental Education Facilities operated by Plymouth University Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE).

Students attending placements or other activities at other NHS Trusts or employers should be aware that arrangements related to religious observance and dress code could vary and it may not be possible for PU PSMD to negotiate adjustments to these arrangements. In this case, students would be expected to abide by the local policy. It will not always be possible, or indeed appropriate, for PU PSMD to provide an alternative placement.

Requesting that a reasonable accommodation be made

The University community is committed, where reasonable and practicable, to accommodating religious observance on campus.

Should any student wish to request that a reasonable accommodation be made, either on campus or on placement, then they should contact the PU PSMD Academic Services Manager, Mrs Emma Spiers at emma.spiers@plymouth.ac.uk

Where appropriate, PU PSMD will 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 policy, then students will be expected to abide by that Trust's decision.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKING WITH PEOPLE

Working with patients

PU PSMD must train all its students to become competent professionals and to reach the 'core competencies' required by their programme of study. Students are required to examine patients, peers and model patients as required during their training (irrespective of their gender, sexuality, culture, beliefs, disability, or disease), and must be willing to examine any individual as fully as is required as part of their training. Therefore all 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 ISCEs.

Engaging in handshaking with patients

Communication skills are crucial to developing a good professional patient relationship. For many patients in the UK, shaking hands is seen as an important courtesy that helps build rapport so the patient feels comfortable.

However students should be aware that patients may have different ways of greeting, and will need to learn 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.

Peer Examinations

Students are expected to learn by practising on other students, and by allowing others to practise on them. This teaching is important in helping students to gain basic clinical examining skills and an understanding of human anatomy before they are asked to examine real patients. Students must participate in recognised teaching and learning activities that may require practising clinical examinations and practical procedures on other students, on a consented basis, and must be willing to allow other students to examine and perform practical procedures on them. Where students are expected to remove their clothing, they will have the option to decline.

Mixed sex groups of students are taught together.

Request for a reasonable accommodation be made

Should any student have a particular concern about the requirements for participating in peer examination, they should contact their tutor privately to discuss the situation.

Working with colleagues

All students are expected to work with fellow students and qualified health professionals (irrespective of their gender, sexuality, culture, beliefs, or disability) while on placement.

3. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH: UNIFORMS AND WORKWEAR POLICY

'Bare below the elbows' DH policy

In 2007 the Department of Health (DH) published its document *Uniforms and work wear: 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.

Variation in dress codes

Each NHS trust has its own regulations, and dress code is decided locally by each Trust's clinical managers and infection prevention and control team. Dress code and other matters related to religious observance may therefore vary between Trusts.

Students attending placements or other activities at other NHS Trusts should be aware that the dress code could vary. We cannot arrange any exemption to any NHS Trusts' dress code.

Students should be aware that PU PSMD trains students for the workplace. This includes understanding the need to comply with the decisions and rules of individual NHS Trusts .



4. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS OF DRESS

Students must maintain appropriate standards of dress, appearance and personal hygiene, both on campus and on placements, so as not to cause offence. The appearance of a student or medical or dental practitioner should not be such as potentially to affect a patient's confidence in that person's professional judgement or standing.

Minimum standards of dress in clinical environments for PU PSMd students are as follows:

- **Clothing must be of smart/professional appearance, clean, tidy and in a good state of repair.**
- **Sleeves should be short-sleeved, or rolled up above the elbow.**
- **Clothing must cover cleavage, midriff and lower back to avoid showing flesh or underwear. Strapless or backless items are not appropriate.**
- **Clothing must be free from potentially offensive words, pictures or logos.**
- **Sports clothing, including leggings, are not acceptable unless required for the role.**
- **Denim, including jeans, is not acceptable in clinical environments.**
- **Skirts/dresses are acceptable if they are just above the knee, but maxi skirts/dresses pose a health and safety risk and should be avoided.**
- **Shoes should be soft-soled with toes covered.**
- **Long hair must be tied up at the back, off the collar.**

- **Nails must be kept clean, short and unvarnished. False nails or extensions are not permitted.**
- **Jewellery, such as wristwatches, necklaces, bracelets and rings (apart from a wedding band), and including crucifixes or other faith related articles, is not permitted in clinical environments. One pair of plain stud earrings is permitted. Other visible body piercing jewellery must be removed.**
- **Tattoos are now more generally accepted in many professional environments, but individual markings and the general appearance must not be offensive or threatening to others. In the clinical environment, gloves may need to be worn to cover permanent or temporary marks on the hands or forearms, and other tattoos may have to be covered.**

Clinical environments, both on campus and on placements, may require specific uniforms or standards of dress, and students are required to abide by the relevant policy.

5. FOREARMS

Sleeve length

For cultural or religious reasons, during times when individuals are not directly treating patients, some students may not wish to expose their forearms.

Some 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, it may be possible to arrange for disposable over-sleeves, elasticated at the elbow and wrist.

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 must still be observed. Disposable 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.

6. SCRUBBING IN

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.

Request for a reasonable accommodation

For cultural or religious reasons some females may wish to be supervised by a female staff member when scrubbing in. This will be accommodated on campus where possible, but students should be aware that it may not always be reasonable for an NHS Trust to make such an accommodation.

7. ALCOHOL-BASED HAND GEL

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 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.



8. THE HIJAB: HEADSCARF

Wearing the Hijab

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, ears and neck but exposes the face.



On campus

It is permitted to wear a Hijab on campus. In laboratories, students must ensure that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) can be worn effectively (see section 15).

On placement

It is permitted to wear a Hijab on placement. For students who wish to wear a headscarf, Hijab or Turban, they are required to use a dedicated headscarf for theatres. This should be made of a material that allows it to be washed at 60 degrees.

It should be kept clean and covered by an appropriate disposable theatre hood in theatre.

9. THE TURBAN

Wearing the Turban

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. In laboratories, students must ensure that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) can be worn effectively (see section 15).

On placement

It is permitted to wear a Turban on placement.

For students who wish to wear a headscarf, Hijab or Turban, they are required to use a dedicated headscarf for theatres. This should be made of a material that allows it to be washed at 60 degrees.

It should be kept clean and covered by an appropriate disposable theatre hood in theatre.

10. THE YARMULKE: SKULLCAP

Wearing the Yarmulke

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.

11. FACE VEIL

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 effectively is expected of all healthcare professionals.

In order to ensure adequate communication, students are expected to expose their face fully to patients, teachers and colleagues in all clinical, laboratory and teaching setting, where they are working with teachers or where they are expected to work together with other students. Students may cover their faces in plenaries or lectures unless specifically asked not to do so by the teacher. PU PSMD accepts that students will be required to cover their faces for reasons of hygiene while undertaking sterile procedures in some clinical or laboratory settings.

Students will be required to uncover their faces for identification purposes, including entry to examinations and the library. Where possible, arrangements will be made in these cases for authentication procedures to be conducted by staff of the same sex as the individual concerned. However, since students are expected to unveil for teaching sessions in mixed groups, if a female staff member is not available then students must be prepared to unveil for a male member of staff performing any such check.

In laboratories, students must ensure that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) can be worn effectively (see section 15).

On placement

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

12. LOOSE DRESS

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 ISCE**

In laboratories, students must ensure that Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) can be worn effectively (see section 15). For health and safety reasons, students may not wear floor length or trailing clothing in laboratories.

On placement

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



13. THE KARAS: STEEL BANGLE

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.

14. THE KIRPAN: CEREMONIAL SWORD

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.

Students should be 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, or tucked inside a belt and covered by clothing.

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 the Kirpan is taped to the student's body.

15. SUITABLE CLOTHING FOR LABORATORY WORK

Laboratory coats

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

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.

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. Headwear 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.

16. IDENTIFICATION CHECKS

ID security checks

For religious or cultural reasons, some female students may choose to wear a facial covering when travelling around the campus.

However, students will be required to uncover their faces for identification purposes, including entry to examinations and the library. Where possible, arrangements will be made in these cases for authentication procedures to be conducted by staff of the same sex as the individual concerned. However, since students are expected to unveil for teaching sessions in mixed groups, if a female staff member is not available then students must be prepared to unveil for a male member of staff performing any such check.

17. TAKING PART IN PROCEDURES

Taking part in abortive procedures/human embryo/fertility treatments

If a medical student does not wish to participate in an attachment which uses abortive procedures on human foetuses and other human embryo and fertility treatments they should discuss this with the Associate Dean for Strategic Planning and Liaison.

Blood transfusions

Members of some religions such as Jehovah Witnesses are prohibited from receiving blood transfusions. However, on some PU PSMD programmes and in order to meet core competencies, students will be expected to take part in procedures that involve taking blood from others – such training may not be avoided.

18. THE ACADEMIC AND EXAMINATION TIMETABLES

Plymouth University and PU PSMD will make every reasonable effort to avoid timetabling assessments or other compulsory activities on major religious festivals. Students should be aware that there may be occasions on which this is not always possible. The major Christian festivals occur during vacations and examinations are scheduled to avoid these dates.

If religious observance could affect your attendance at teaching and learning activities during an academic year (in term time, Monday to Friday, usually between 8am – 6pm), you should discuss this as soon as possible with the PU PSMD Academic Services Manager, Mrs Emma Spiers at emma.spiers@plymouth.ac.uk.

Assessment dates are published in advance, and if you have strict religious requirements that may affect your attendance at an assessment or examination you must notify the PU PSMD Academic Services Manager, Mrs Emma Spiers at emma.spiers@plymouth.ac.uk as soon as possible in writing of any conflicting dates.

The School will give the matter sympathetic consideration and try to make reasonable adjustments. However, you should understand that adjustment may not always be possible.

Deadlines for handing in coursework are published in advance and will not be extended to allow for religious observance. You must manage your time and workload accordingly.

Unforeseeable events, such as the death of a close relative when there are specific forms of mourning are handled under the arrangements for considering extenuating circumstances.

19. MULTIFAITH AND QUIET CONTEMPLATION ROOMS

The University Chaplaincy is based at Kirkby Terrace, on the main Plymouth University campus. There is a team of Chaplains from all the major Christian denominations, and contacts and advisers representing all the other major world faiths. The facilities include a lounge, a quiet room available for prayer or meditation, which is used by people from a wide range of traditions, and an Islamic Prayer room available for individual prayer throughout the day.

Prayer needs of admissions candidates

On request, Academic Services will ensure a room is set aside for admission candidates to use in between admissions interviews should they wish to pray.



20. FOOD

On campus

Students with special dietary needs are welcome to bring their own food into the University. The University cafés do not provide Kosher or Halal food.

On placement

Students with special dietary requirements 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

PU PSMD 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 and how the accommodation was made, or the objective justification for not being able to do so.**

Data collected will be used to support the University's obligations to the Public Sector Equality Duty, Equality Act 2010. Anonymised monitoring information will be reviewed annually.

22. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Developed with kind permission from the St George's, University of London 'Religion & Belief Code of Practice: Guidance'.

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