



UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

Guidance for supporting staff who are fasting
(Version 2.0)



Table of Contents

1. Summary and purpose 3

2. Guidance 3

 2.1 Talking to your line manager 3

 2.2 Changing working patterns 4

 2.3 Time off work 4

 2.4 General support 4

3. Legal requirements 5

4. Further advice 5

5. Appendix A – Examples of fasting in world religions 7

6. Document Governance 8

1. Summary and purpose

During a staff member's time with the University of Plymouth they may spend some time fasting depending on their religion/belief. In the Bahá'í faith for example, there is a nineteen day fast each year, in Judaism there is a 25 hour fast during Yom Kippur and Muslims will fast from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan. A form of fasting or restrictive eating/drinking is practised by almost all major religions (see [Appendix A](#) for further examples).

As with all religions/beliefs, each individual will practice their faith differently but this document should offer some guidance to line managers and colleagues in how to best support staff who are fasting. This guidance is for staff only and students are encouraged to contact Student Wellbeing Services and their programme leads if they have concerns related to fasting whilst studying at the University of Plymouth.

2. Definitions

Fasting	<p>This policy concerns fasting for religious or spiritual purposes.</p> <p>Fasts are different for different faiths and generally mean not consuming food and water for a set period of time. A fast may also include forgoing smoking, brushing teeth and chewing gum as well as not consuming food.</p> <p>Fasts or restrictive eating in some faiths also require abstinence from sexual activity, limited physical activity, multiple prayer services, wearing certain materials and bathing or washing.</p> <p>Individuals who are worried about breaking your fast to take a Covid-19 test or for any other medical reason you should speak to your faith leader.</p>
Restrictive eating	<p>This policy concerns restrictive eating for religious or spiritual purposes.</p> <p>Restrictive eating is the practice of avoiding certain foods or abstaining from consuming certain food groups for a set period of time. For example, Jewish people may not eat 'Chametz' items during Pesach/Passover and Eastern Christians may not eat meat, dairy or fish products during Lent.</p>

3. Guidance

3.1 Talking to your line manager

3.1.1 Staff members who are fasting are strongly encouraged to inform their line manager so they understand fasting, how long they are fasting for and the likely effects. If you are concerned about the impact of fasting on your health then contact Occupational Health for support and guidance.

3.1.2 Line Managers should treat a conversation with the member of staff who is fasting as confidential and ask them how you can best support them. You should agree with the member of staff who you should tell within your team.



3.2 Changing working patterns

3.2.1 During a period of fasting, staff members may wish to pray more frequently. Line managers and colleagues should respect this and be supportive of their right to pray.

3.2.2 Allow use of flexible working and for breaks to be spread out throughout the day and be flexible in start and finish times wherever possible.

3.2.3 Energy levels are likely to be higher during the morning so arrange meetings, training events and important tasks in the morning where you can

3.2.4 If a staff members' job role includes operating heavy machinery or driving whilst they are fasting then this could have health and safety implications. If you are concerned then you should contact [Health and Safety](#).

3.3 Time off work

3.3.1 Not all religious festivals will require time off work and many staff members will want to continue working when they can. However, you should anticipate an increase in annual leave requests around certain religious holidays; Yom Kippur for example is a 25 hour fast and Jewish staff may want to attend synagogue for the day.

3.3.2 Where leave can be accommodated, it is recommended that you grant it but bear in mind that staff should aim to have their leave spread evenly over the year to give adequate time for rest.

3.3.3 Try to avoid planning events during periods where staff may be fasting or be aware of and supporting of reasons why staff who are fasting may not be able to attend.

3.3.4 At the end of some periods of fasting there is a celebration event such as Eid at the end of Ramadan. Managers should be prepared to grant leave at short notice to accommodate festivities where possible.

3.4 General support

3.4.1 Encourage awareness and understanding of religious festivals by using the University's [Diversity Calendar](#). This should **not** be done to highlight an individual's faith, but rather as an opportunity for the whole team to build on their knowledge.

3.4.2 The University is a secular organisation. For example, whilst it is appropriate to wish people a 'Happy Christmas', this can be exclusionary to people who do not celebrate the same festivals as you might do. Ensure that you give equal prominence to all religious and cultural festivals and refer to times of the year such as 'Winter break' instead of 'Christmas break' and 'Spring break' instead of 'Easter break'.

3.4.3 If working on campus, avoid having cakes, biscuits, fruit and other food items in meetings or in staff wellbeing/rest areas during periods of fasting.



3.4.4 Multi-faith prayers rooms are available at the Pastoral and Spiritual Centre and 20 Endsleigh Place on the Main Campus. Line managers and colleagues should consider putting space aside in their buildings/work areas for quiet prayer if there is not adequate prayer space nearby or if these prayer spaces are unavailable due to Covid-19 restrictions.

3.4.5 Understandably, staff who are fasting could be tired or irritable; managers and colleagues should be sympathetic to this and understand why this may be so. Fasting could also result in hypoglycaemia, headaches and loss of concentration; anticipate that extra breaks may be required.

4. Legal requirements

There are no specific legal requirements with regard to fasting, however freedom of religion/belief is covered under the Equality Act (2010) and in order to comply with legal requirements, line managers and staff members should bear the following in mind:

4.1 If a line manager refuses a request concerning fasting (such as flexible working or annual leave) there must be a good, proportionate and appropriate business reason for doing so.

4.2 If a staff member is making a request it should be reasonable and take into account the requirements of their role and the University.

4.3 Line managers and staff members should ensure that any requests do not place unreasonable extra burdens on other staff

4.4 It is possible that job performance and productivity may reduce during a period of fasting. Line managers must make allowances for this; criticising a staff member's performance during this time could be discriminatory.

5. Further advice

As with all world religions, staff members may follow their faith differently so whilst some Christians may take part in a form of fasting during lent, others may not. This is particularly the case for any members of staff who may not fast due to health conditions; for example a Jewish person may follow all aspects of their faith except fasting but instead may just limit their fluid and food intake. It is important to not make assumptions based on someone's faith, but rather be led by them and ask how best you can support.

All members of staff, including line managers can access additional support and advice via one of the following routes:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Website: www.plymouth.ac.uk/equality

Email: equality@plymouth.ac.uk

University Occupational Health

Website: www.plymouth.ac.uk/about-us/university-structure/service-areas/occupational-health

Email: occupationalhealth@plymouth.ac.uk



UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

University Pastoral and Spiritual Support

Website: www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/services/student-services/faith-and-spiritual-support

Email: studentservices@plymouth.ac.uk

UPSU Student Societies (faith and belief)

Website: www.upsu.com/societies

6. Appendix A – Examples of fasting in world religions

Festival	Time of year*	Type of fast
Lent (Western Christianity)	February-March	Fasting and/or restrictive eating
Nineteen Day Fast (Baha'i)	March	Fast from sunrise to sunset
Lent/The Great Fast (Eastern Christianity)	March-April	Restrictive eating (no meat, fish or dairy)
Pesach/Passover (Judaism)	March-April	Restrictive eating (no 'Chametz' items)
Lailat-UI-Bara'ah (Islam)	March-June	Fast from sunrise to sunset
Ramadan (Islam)	March-June	Fast from sunrise to sunset for a month
Adar Mah Parab (Zoroastrian)	April-May	Restrictive eating (no food is cooked in the home)
Tisha B'Av (Judaism)	April-May	Fast from sunrise to sunset
Yaum-Arafah (Islam)	June-August	Fast from sunrise to sunset for Muslims not on Hajj
Ashura (Islam)	July-September	Fast day observed by Sunni Muslims
Janmashtami/ Krishna Jayanti (Hindu)	August-September	Fast observed until midnight
Samvatsari (Jain)	September-October	Fast observed
Paryushan Parva (Jain)	September-October	Fasting and/or restricted eating
Yom Kippur (Judaism)	September-October	Fast for 25 hours

*exact dates vary each year based on differences in religious calendars. Staff are advised to check the current [Diversity Calendar](#) for exact dates.

7. Document Governance

TITLE	Staff Networks Guidance
DOCUMENT REF NUMBER	UOP/HR/G/2.29 (Version 2.)
DOCUMENT PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION	Guidance for staff and line managers on how to support staff who are fasting for religious purposes.
AUTHOR	Ariel Chapman
APPROVAL DATE	May 2019
APPROVAL COMMITTEE	University Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee
PUBLICATION DATE	September 2019
NEXT REVIEW DATE	April 2025
FREQUENCY OF REVIEW	Every 3 years
DOCUMENT OWNER	EDI Manager
CONSULTATION PROCESS	HR Partners > HR Senior Leadership Team > UEDIC > UEG
EQUALITY ANALYSIS	Y
REFERENCES	
AUTHOR CONTACT DETAILS	Ariel.chapman@plymouth.ac.uk

HR Document Review History

VERSION NO.	DATE OF CHANGE	ORIGINATOR OF CHANGE	DESCRIPTION OF CHANGE
1	May 2019	EDI Manager	Document published
2	April 2021	EDI Manager	Added to new document template, Appendix A added and contact details updated.