



UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

Guidance for supporting staff who are fasting

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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.

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.

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.

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.

Changing working patterns

- 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.
- Allow use of flexible working and for breaks to be spread out throughout the day
- Be flexible in start and finish times where possible
- Energy levels are likely to be higher during the morning so arrange meetings, training events and important tasks in the morning where you can
- 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 contact the [Health and Safety department](#).

Time off work

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 would want to attend synagogue for the day.

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

General Support

There are lots of things that line managers and colleagues can do to support staff during periods of fasting:

- Encourage awareness and understanding of religious festivals by using the University's [Diversity Calendar](#) or by contacting equality@plymouth.ac.uk for additional resources to share with your teams and colleagues. 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.
- Avoid having cakes, biscuits and other food items in meetings or in staff wellbeing/rest areas.
- Multi-faith prayers rooms are available at the University Chaplaincy 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.
- 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.

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:

- 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
- If a staff member is making a request it should be reasonable and take into account the requirements of their role and the University
- Line managers and staff members should ensure that any requests do not place unreasonable extra burdens on other staff
- 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.

Additional Support/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:

University of Plymouth Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Team

Telephone: 01752 588261

Email: equality@plymouth.ac.uk

University of Plymouth Occupational Health

Telephone: 01752 587412

Email: occupationalhealth@plymouth.ac.uk

University of Plymouth Multi-faith Chaplaincy:

Telephone: 01752 587760

Email: chaplaincy@plymouth.ac.uk

Alternatively, you can contact the Employee Relations Specialist for your Faculty/Department for additional advice.