



# UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH

## **Fasting Guidance for staff and students**

(Version 4)

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## 1. Summary and purpose

During work or study at the University of Plymouth, staff and students 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 offers guidance for staff and students fasting, how to support themselves and each other during a time of fasting and offers advice to line managers and programmes leads on how best to support staff and students who are fasting. Staff should also contact their Line Manager and Occupational Health for additional support if they are fasting and students are encouraged to contact Student Wellbeing Services and/or their programme leads.

## 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 some Christians may not eat meat, dairy or fish products during Lent.</p>

## 3. Guidance for staff and line managers

### 3.1. Initial conversation

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 or your faith leader for support and guidance. Additional guidance for staff who are fasting is available in Appendix B.

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 as the end time of periods of fasting may change depending on the lunar cycle.

## **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 cannot accommodate 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 members of staff 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. Guidance for students and programme leads

### 5.1. Initial conversation

- 5.1.1. The University tries to avoid scheduling assessments during main religious festivals but this is not always possible. Students who are fasting are encouraged to inform their programme lead and any other relevant staff so they understand fasting, the length of the fast and the likely side-effects. If you are concerned about the impact of fasting on your health then you should contact the University Medical Centre or your GP as well as your faith leader. Additional guidance for students who are fasting during exams is available in Appendix C.
- 5.1.2. Students can also contact our Faith Advisors in our Pastoral and Spiritual Support Centre or you may wish to contact the local faith community; a list is available online [here](#).
- 5.1.3. If you are concerned about any element of fasting or how this may impact your studies then you can also contact UPSU Advice or the relevant UPSU Society for confidential advice.
- 5.1.4. Programme leads should treat a conversation with a student who is fasting as confidential and ask how best to support them.

## 6. Time off studying

- 6.1. Not all religious festivals will require time off work and many students will want to continue working when they can. However, you should anticipate that some days off may be required around certain religious holidays; Yom Kippur for example is a 25 hour fast and Jewish staff may want to attend synagogue for the day.
- 6.2. Programme leads should try to avoid planning events during periods where students may be fasting and be aware of and supporting of reasons why students who are fasting may not be able to attend events. Fasting periods for the current academic year are listed within the University's [Inclusion Planner](#).
- 6.3. At the end of some periods of fasting there is a celebration event such as Eid at the end of Ramadan. Programme leads should be flexible in attendance when students are timetabled to attend lectures/seminars which coincide with religious celebrations.

## 7. Fasting on placement

- 7.1. If a student will be on placement during a period of fasting then they should inform their placement supervisor and personal tutor. Placement supervisors and personal tutors may wish to use the Guidance for staff and line managers (Section 3) to help with their conversations or follow the advice/guidance of their workplace.
- 7.2. Placements can often be busy places and the placement supervisor may be busy with many competing tasks so students should ensure they give plenty of notice about how fasting may impact their time on placement.
- 7.3. Students are encouraged to practice discipline around eating and sleeping habits during a period of fasting so they can fulfil their placement duties safely. They should drink

plenty of water before and after the fast to keep their body hydrated.

- 7.4. Students may need to pray more regularly during a fasting period if they cannot take time out of their placement and should discuss with their placement supervisor. Most hospitals, schools or other placement locations will have a quiet space for students to pray in.
- 7.5. If students will be breaking their fast whilst at placement, they may wish to consider speaking to others of the same faith so they can break fast together in a communal area.
- 7.6. Students who are ill or pregnant should seek medical and religious advice before fasting to protect their health and wellbeing.

## 8. Supporting staff and students

- 8.1. Encourage awareness and understanding of religious festivals by using the University's [Inclusion Planner](#). This should not be done to highlight an individual's faith, but rather as an opportunity for everyone to build on their knowledge.
- 8.2. The University is a secular organisation. For example, whilst it is appropriate to wish people a 'Happy Christmas', ensure that you give equal prominence to all religious and cultural festivals. You should refer to times of the year such as 'Winter break' instead of 'Christmas break' and 'Spring break' instead of 'Easter break'.
- 8.3. If working on campus, avoid having cakes, biscuits, fruit and other food items in meetings or in staff/student wellbeing/rest areas during periods of fasting.
- 8.4. Multi-faith prayers rooms are available at the Pastoral and Spiritual Centre on the [Main Campus](#). Line managers, colleagues and programme leads 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.
- 8.5. Understandably, staff and students who are fasting could be tired or irritable; members of the University community 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.

## 9. Further advice

As with all world religions, staff and students 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 staff or students 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.

Our staff and students have the right to practice their faith in a safe and welcoming environment. The University of Plymouth has a zero-tolerance approach to incidents of abuse, harm or hate and we encourage everyone within our University community to report incidents using our [Speak Up tool](#).

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

**Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** Website: [www.plymouth.ac.uk/equality](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/equality) Email: [equality@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:equality@plymouth.ac.uk)

**University Occupational Health**

Website: [www.plymouth.ac.uk/about-us/university-structure/service-areas/occupational-health](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/about-us/university-structure/service-areas/occupational-health) Email: [occupationalhealth@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:occupationalhealth@plymouth.ac.uk)

**University Pastoral and Spiritual Support**

Website: [www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/services/student-services/faith-and-spiritual-support](http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/services/student-services/faith-and-spiritual-support) Email: [studentservices@plymouth.ac.uk](mailto:studentservices@plymouth.ac.uk)

UPSU Student Societies (faith and belief)

Website: [www.upsu.com/societies](http://www.upsu.com/societies)

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## 10. 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)	July-August	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 [Inclusion Planner](#) and associated guidance for exact dates.

## 11. Appendix B – Fasting guidance for staff

### Staying hydrated

- If your fast allows you to drink water then it's really important that you keep drinking plenty of water.
- If you cannot drink water whilst fasting then make sure you drink plenty before and after your fast.
- Be careful not to drink too much in one go; trying to drink gallons of water all at once can make you very ill and could induce a potentially fatal condition called water intoxication.

### Eating well

- When eating before your fast it can be tempting to eat more than feels comfortable but you should aim to have balanced meals including food that will release energy slowly to keep you going through your fast.
- Lots of whole grains, proteins and healthy fats (like nuts and olives) are a great way to stay feeling full and you should eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, especially water-rich fruit and vegetables like cucumber and watermelon to help you stay hydrated.
- Eating after your fast is often a cause for celebration and is of high cultural and religious significance, try not to go overboard!
- Eat mindfully and slowly with breaks in between courses to make sure you don't get uncomfortable or a stomach upset.

### Health concerns

- Most religions allow fasting to be stopped if you have health concerns, if you are pregnant or if you are very young or very old. Check with your faith leader if you are worried about the impact fasting may have on your health.

### Telling your colleagues and manager

- You are under no obligation to tell your colleagues that you are fasting, but we recommend you tell your line manager and consider telling your colleagues if you feel comfortable doing so.
- They will want to support you and going through this guidance document with them may be helpful so they can better understand how fasting may impact your work. You may also need to discuss more flexible start and finish times and the times you need to be away from your desk for prayer.
- If you are fasting for a short period of time (for example the Yom Kippur 25 hour fast for our Jewish colleagues) then you may wish to consider taking leave or some time out of work.
- The University of Plymouth has a zero tolerance approach to all forms of discrimination, abuse or hate and we encourage you to report any inappropriate behaviour if you experience it. You can report online via our [Speak Up tool](#) or speak to the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Team in confidence](#).

## 12. Appendix C – Fasting guidance for students during exams

### Staying hydrated

- If your fast allows you to drink water then it's really important that you keep drinking plenty of water.
- If you cannot drink water whilst fasting then make sure you drink plenty before and after your fast.
- Be careful not to drink too much in one go; trying to drink gallons of water all at once can make you very ill and could induce a potentially fatal condition called water intoxication.

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### Health concerns

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### During the exam period

- If you are fasting during the exam period it is important for you to plan ahead and start your revision in plenty of time with a revision plan and strategy
- Rest when you can; try and avoid too much physical activity and stay out of the sun if it is hot. You might want to plan a 45-60 minute rest in the middle of the day if you have an exam in the afternoon.
- Our guidance on staying hydrated and eating well is particularly important during the exam period. You may wish to take a bottle of water into the exam room with you in case of emergency.
- If you are anxious or worried about fasting during the exam period then you can visit the Pastoral and Spiritual Support Centre and speak a faith advisor.

### 13. Document Governance

<b>TITLE</b>	Fasting Guidance for staff and students
<b>DOCUMENT REF NUMBER</b>	UOP/HR/G/2.29
<b>DOCUMENT PURPOSE AND DESCRIPTION</b>	Guidance for staff and the line managers and students and their programme leads who are fasting for religious purposes
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<b>EQUALITY ANALYSIS</b>	Y
<b>REFERENCES</b>	

### 14. HR Document Review History

<b>Version No.</b>	<b>Date of Change</b>	<b>Updated by</b>	<b>Description of change</b>
1	May 2019	EDI Manager	Document published
2	April 2021	EDI Manager	Added to new document template, Appendix A added and contact details updated.
3	July 2021	EDI Manager	Guidance expanded to include guidance for students and programme leads.
4	August 2022	EDI Manager	Section numbering and document owner details updated