Faith and student success

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October 2021

Contents

Introduction

This small-scale project aimed to investigate whether having a faith either helps enhance or works against students' success at the University of Leeds, as well as what may inform this – for example, relationships with other staff or students, or how institutional policies are applied. To do this, the project explored how and where faith, religion or belief is recognised by the university, including in key policy documents; how commitments to recognising faith, religion or belief are enacted in institutional practice; and how students experience this, including relationships with staff and other students. The report sets out the context of the project, outlines the approach to the research, then lists key findings, recommendations, and limitations to the research.

Thank you to all those who participated in this research.

Key findings

- Students who declare a religion are significantly less likely to be offered a place to study at the University of Leeds than those who declare they have no religion. As a consequence, common with other Russell Group universities, some groups, such as Muslim students, are under-represented at the University.

- There is no awarding gap data for religious students but as there is a correlation between religion and ethnic groups, it is likely that the awarding gap (between those who are awarded a 1st or upper 2nd class degree and those who are not) of 11% between white students and Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic students would also be reflected in data on religion.

- There are several helpful resources and information aimed at religious students, but this is not always known about and can be difficult to find, whilst key contacts are not always listed.

- Students have mixed experiences. Largely the University is perceived to be diverse and tolerant but not all students are comfortable about practising their religion on campus or may find practical support difficult to come by. In addition, a minority have experienced discrimination or hostility.

- Students have to work hard to find policies and information to support them and consider this could be more readily available and support more proactively offered.

- The chaplaincy is well-regarded and highly valued, as is other well-being support.

Key recommendations

- A more proactive approach to ensuring students are aware of support and support policies should be adopted across the institution. In addition, all staff should understand how to deal with student concerns or requests for support.

- Policies focused on faith and inclusion should be made more visible and accessible to both staff and students, as well as external visitors to the University website. In addition, they should be held in one place on the website, owned by named individuals, and offer contact details for more information.

- There should be more extensive religious literacy training for students and staff and a greater emphasis on developing cross-cultural and inter-faith understanding.

- The University should implement further practical support, including catering for a wider variety of religious food requirements, as well as greater timetabling flexibility.

Diversity of the religious student body in higher education

The national picture

- Data on students' religion was not routinely collated, or published by universities until it became mandatory to do so in 2017/18. This, in part, accounts for why there is significantly less known about the experiences of religious students than other groups, such as those from Black, Asian, and ethnic minority backgrounds.

- Data suggests, however, that over half of students report that they have a religion or belief[1] with around 65% of those students declaring that they are Christian and 18% Muslim, followed by Hindu (4.4%), 'other' religion (3.6%), Buddhist (3.5%), Spiritual (2.6%), Sikh (1.7%) and Jewish (0.9%) (Codiroli Mcmaster, 2020).

- There are variations however, relating to age (those who declare a religion tend to be older students), disability (for example, over 27% of Spiritual and 20% of Jewish students disclose a disability, compared to, for example 7.8% of Muslim students), and domicile – with lower rates for UK domiciled students than international students (Codiroli Mcmaster, 2020).). In addition, there is significant diversity across programmes being studied (for example both Hindu and Muslim students are significantly over-represented in SET subjects) as well as the level of study – with higher rates for religious students on post-graduate programmes, reflecting the age profile of those students (Ibid.).

- There are significant differentials across the student cohort in relation to where students study, as well as their progression through HE and their degree outcomes. For example:

  - Muslim students are underrepresented, and Jewish students are significantly over-represented, in Russell Group universities (Codiroli Mcmaster, 2020).
  - Progression for UK domiciled full-time first degree entrants[2] is highest for Jewish students (93.1%) and lowest for Muslim students (84.9%) (AdvanceHE, 2020).
  - 86.8% of Jewish students are awarded a 1st or 2:1, compared to 79.8% of those who report no religion or belief, and just 64.4% of Muslim students.
  - Again, however, there are some disciplinary differences: Muslim students have the largest awarding gap in both SET (Science, Technology, Engineering) and non-SET subjects, whereas the awarding gap for Sikh students is lower in SET than non-SET subjects, whilst the converse is true for Spiritual students (Codiroli Mcmaster, 2020).

At the University of Leeds

Applications

- Just over 45% of 'home' UK-domiciled UG students (applying through UCAS) declared that they have a religion or belief. This is higher for EU students, at 72%, and even higher for Overseas students at 77%.

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[1] There are of course differences between declaring a particular affiliation and actively practising a religion, faith or belief, and religion is always self-defined, and self-reported. Moreover, results can vary depending on how the question is asked. For example, the Census asks 'What is your religion?' (with over two thirds declaring a religion), whereas the British Social Attitudes Annual Survey uses the question 'Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?' which produces a result of 'no religion' for 52% of those surveyed.

[2] Aged 21 and under.

- Students who declare a religion are significantly less likely to be offered a place to study at the University: 59% of Home students who declare a religion, are compared to 70% of those with 'no religion'). The offer rate for EU students is slightly higher at 52% but significantly worse for Overseas students where only 39% of those with a religion are offered a place.
- 21% of Home students accepted their offer compared to 23% of those with no religion. For EU students there was no difference, at 22%. For Overseas students, it is the converse – 8% of those with no religion accept their place compared to 21% of those who declare a religion.

Registered students
- In terms of the largest groups: 60% of undergraduate students have no known religion; 25% declared they are Christian. Fewer EU students declare they have no religion (37%) and 51% state that they are Christian. For Overseas students 53% have no religion and 25% are Muslim.
- This is broadly similar for Taught Postgraduate students, research postgraduate home and EU students. However, the two largest groups differ for Overseas students, with 42% Sikh and 42% Muslim.
- There is as yet no data on religion for degree classification. However, the awarding gap between home white and home Black, Asia and Minority Ethnic students is 11% - with 93% of White Home UG students awarded a I or II(i) but only 82% of Black, Asian and minority ethnic UG students received the same outcome. The numbers for EU and overseas students also indicate a gap but the numbers are very low and/or non-disclosure high.

Approach to the research

The research involved:

1. **An analysis of key university web pages and documents** to determine the extent to which faith/religion/belief is explicitly referred to (if at all) in key mainstream documents. This included three main types of pages: website pages that explicitly mention faith, religion, or belief; website pages that are focused on students (for example, Welcomes, Induction and Transitions and Sense of Belonging pages); website pages with links to key institutional policies and strategy documents.

For each source, the following details were recorded: ease of accessibility of the source; author whether faith, religion, and belief (or lack of) was explicitly mentioned; what key messages (if any) about faith, religion, and belief (or lack of) are outlined; what tone is used when referring to faith, religion, and belief (or lack of); whether any religions are specifically mentioned and if so which ones and in what context; whether it notes who explicitly has responsibility for actions/support; whether the documents or website pages are connected/cross-referenced. The documents analysed are summarised in Appendix 1. Findings from the analysis helped to frame the interview questions for staff and students.

1. **Interviews with ten students** at the University of Leeds to determine if, and how, (if at all) faith/religion/belief is considered to play a role in their success as a student.
2. **Interviews with ten staff** at the University of Leeds to determine the extent to which they explicitly consider faith/religion/belief when developing approaches designed to support student success, and what might account for this.

A mix of snowballing sampling and social media and emailing recruitment techniques were used to obtain participants. Interviews included questions on how, from an individual perspective, faith was,

or could be, practiced on campus, barriers to religious practices, how religion/faith is considered within departments, flexibility in relation to faith, and suggestions on how current strategies can be improved. These questions were mostly open-ended questions to encourage a unique line of prompts between each person. Each transcript was used to create a short thematic analysis and a table of "short wins" and longer-term goals was compiled.

Ethical approval was granted by the university prior to the commencement of data collection. All students and staff who contributed were sent an invitation to participate along with an information sheet; they volunteered to partake in the interview by signing a consent form.

Student participant demographics are identified in Appendix 2a and staff participant demographics in Appendix 2b. Student interview questions are listed in Appendix 3a and those for staff in Appendix 3b.

Findings

Documentary analysis

- There are a number of useful, focused, informative resources for students of faith. However these are not located in one obvious place on the University's website, and it would likely take some searching for students or staff to locate them.
- It is not always clear who owns and/or has responsibility for a policy document or web page, and not all documents have a named person who can be contacted for more information
- The tone varies across the policy documents/website pages. Some are warm and friendly, and others are more formal and slightly less 'approachable'.
- Regardless of tone, across the majority of the documents/pages reviewed much of the responsibility is placed on the student to seek out further information or look for support elsewhere.

Interviews: Student perspectives

The students interviewed came from different backgrounds and had different experiences and perspectives. Listed below, however, are broad findings from an analysis of the interviews.

Religion and belief on campus

- Overall students considered the University to be a tolerant and accepting space and recognised that the university was a very diverse place for students.
- Some students didn't necessarily expect the University to acknowledge religion, however. Moreover, it was felt that religion was rarely acknowledged within some programmes in order to keep things "as neutral as possible". In contrast, other students felt their school was very open about, and accommodating of religion. For example, sending out emails highlighting religious holidays, as well as reminders to book notifications of absences, showing signs of support.
- Some students came into the university expecting difficulties in practising their faith. In particular, they found there was pressure to fit in with, for example, "a lot of the socials are drinking" which they felt was a factor contributing to the feeling of being "pushed to the periphery" in social situations. In contrast, others felt at ease in practising their faith and being accepted, noting the ease of access to prayer facilities, pastoral care services, and the university chaplain.
- Only a couple of students described facing direct discrimination or hostility in relation to their religion. However, those that did were not always confident in tackling this with one noting that they found it difficult to confront the behaviour as it was "discreet" so although

they "move on with their day… "there's always something that in the back of your mind are they treating me a certain way because of this". This same student also noted that they felt they had to work "many times harder" as a black Muslim student than someone who was Muslim and not of a black ethnic minority. In contrast another student who had a threatening comment made, due to him being a "working class and brown Muslim" used the student equality and diversity policy as well as their department's codes of conduct to raise a concern to the university.

- For a number of students, a lack of diversity on their course (especially when combined with other characteristics such as race) was problematic, causing feelings of insecurity. This was particularly the case for those from minority faiths. Moreover, it was noted that there was a lack of integration with people of other faiths.
- In addition, it was felt that there was a lack of understanding of her faith amongst non-religious peers who were considered to be "treading on eggshells around it" or that, for example, people often "saw my hijab before seeing me as an individual person".

Support for students

- There was good awareness of the university chaplaincy, which offers counselling and wellbeing support for any student on campus, as well as other sources of support. In addition, a number of students noted that faith had a significant and positive impact on wellbeing, for example, one student noted that practising her religion helped her to "not take things so personally and remind me that some things were out of my control".
- Prayer times regularly clashed with timetabled sessions. This caused tensions, with students accepting that they could only pray outside the prescribed prayer times.
- Access to prayer rooms was, however, broadly praised, although some students were less aware of them than others and prayed only outside of the university. Other students felt well catered for. For example, the Worsley Building (for dental and medical students) has a dedicated prayer room with ablution facilities, which gives students the opportunity to "pray, chill, contemplate, and then head out and go back into labs, which is only 30 seconds away". Other prayer facilities mentioned included the Green room, located behind the Edge, which has a "really nice" atmosphere, especially during the month of Ramadan.
- Halal food was not readily available and a lack of certainty about the content of some dishes or other food meant that students tended to choose vegetarian food. Increasing labelling on food products could avoid this issue.
- Those who did not wish to socialise where alcohol was served, felt they were "missing out a little bit on the university experience", mainly due to the big focus on hosting events in non-inclusive environments, which has led to feeling left out in getting to know others. In addition, this affected whether students chose to stand for committee roles, or office etc.
- Faith-based societies such as ISOC play a strong role in helping contribute to a sense of belonging, as interacting with students with the same faith and values made them feel "more at home", whilst being able to practice and celebrate religious days together reduced the sense of loneliness at university. Such societies also offer a safe space to discuss sensitive topics within her religion without feeling judged. The provision of free food packages to fasting students during Ramadan including "boxes with watermelon and lots of other fantastic things in there which was provided to students who could not afford it" brought students together in doing "good deeds".
- There was a lack of support noted for those in clinical placements who did not feel comfortable showing their arms (in adherence to the "Bare below elbows" policy) with an absence of alternatives such as sterile long-sleeved aprons. However, the provision of masks

with straps as well as looped masks was a hugely welcomed choice for those who wear a headscarf, making their clinical sessions much more comfortable.
- A number of the students noted that they felt guilty taking student loans with interest but were forced to do so to attend university, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.
- There was, largely, a lack of awareness about policies and practices which might support religious students although most students had a sense that such things existed and that they would need to seek them out if needed. In relation to requesting absences on religious grounds, this was largely positive. Although there were instances where requests were refused without explanation. Overall policies and practices operated in a largely abstract manner and were reactive rather than proactive.
- Finally, students recognised that faith was one just facet of many to academic success, with one student noting, for example, that "you should tie your own camel before you put your faith into God". However, where students did encounter issues they were largely forced to advocate for their own needs to be met.

Interviews: Staff perspectives

As with students, the staff interviewed came from different backgrounds and had different experiences and perspectives. Listed below are broad findings from an analysis of their interviews.

Religion and belief on campus
- It was broadly recognised that the University had developed its practices and approach towards religious diversity and supporting religious students, but that being non-religious was still largely accepted as the norm and there was still a need for further awareness training.
- Many staff had engaged in developing their awareness of different religions/religious literacy, but this had not normally been accessed through the university.
- That said it was recognised that there was research being undertaken by staff across the university on religion, including religion on campus.
- It was noted that there was a need for greater religious diversity amongst the staffing body as it remained predominately white, and Christian/atheist/agnostic.

Support for students
- It was considered that further religious literacy training would help build greater confidence in engaging with students with different faiths and from different backgrounds.
- Staff broadly considered the university had support available to students but that it was not always proactively offered, readily available, or transparently implemented. In addition, much of the support for students appeared to come from the chaplaincy and SU religious societies rather than from mainstream support services. Policies did not seem to be consistently applied.
- In addition, intersectionality was not always recognised and this needs to be considered more fully. Moreover, staff commented that they often did not know the demographic makeup of their student body, including their religion or belief.
- The use of information from the Students' union had helped understanding and practices where these have conflicted with the support needs of religious students.

Recommendations

Developing awareness and offering support

- Further emphasis to be given to the fact that faith-based support is available for everybody regardless of their level of faith (or lack of) which may encourage more students to access support that they previously thought they were not entitled to.

- In addition, although the communication line between staff and students is improving, more could and should be done to act on the (religious) student voice.

- Those involved in induction to have a more consistent emphasis on religion and faith during fresher's week, for example by having an event to remind students of the various faith-based support systems in place, places of worship available on and around campus, and the importance of mutual respect between peers whilst at university.

- Schools and departments should ensure faith/religious support is clearly signposted during welcome/inductions for new students and staff.

- Student societies to do more to ensure social events are more inclusive of faiths or at least offer an alternative so students (particularly new students) can build a sense of belonging more easily and promote a more inclusive environment. Recommendations included:

    - Having a society/club where students who want to gain better religious literacy can access this education in a safe non-judgmental space.

    - A better use of social media to educate students on each other's faiths and how to be inclusive of one another, with one student noting that: "people aren't necessarily going to read a website, but they're always on their phone".

    - Organising and promoting more interfaith events or opportunities to interact, which would help decrease segregation based on faith whilst simultaneously improving religious literacy.

Applying policies and practice equitably and transparently

- The University should implement and adopt a more purposeful and proactive support strategy for example through having a more open student-staff communication line and utilising the data each school collects from their students to help staff anticipate what considerations they may need to put in place.

- Policies focused on faith and inclusion should be made more visible and accessible to both staff and students, and external visitors to the University website. Once in place, there should be concerted awareness-raising, especially for students, on where to go to find support, with relevant policy documents summarised and easily accessible.

- In addition, the University should provide a clearer approach for staff on how to deal with any equality and diversity issues, which is more easily understandable for students. This could involve having a very clear document that describes "exactly word for word" what a student needs to do when being faced with a problem, with an obviously staffed email inbox so students are clear their concerns will be heard and responded to.

Accommodating religious needs

- The University should cater for a wider variety of religious food requirements (for example, halal, kosher, vegetarian) which would allow more students to access food on campus, making their busy schedules easier instead of having to buy food from outside the University.

- Clinical students should be provided with full-length sleeves aprons to allow them to continue practising their faith comfortably without breaching health and safety policies. In addition, acknowledging such struggles can also make students feel that they are seen and that their struggles are not invisible but are important.

- Students should be offered support on how to deal with the tension between their religious beliefs and taking student loans with interest.

- A more flexible examination timetable would allow flexibility not only for religious reasons, but for other reasons such as disability, health issues, and care responsibilities. As one student noted: "at the end of the day, most people would probably benefit from a more flexible assessment regime".

Creating an Inclusive Environment on Campus

- The University should offer more religious literacy training, which may include promoting more widely those approaches that are already available such as those developed by Haynes Collins (see list here [Haynes Collins MOOC and Free Online Courses | MOOC List (mooc-list.com)](https://mooc-list.com)).

- Creating greater allyship should be encouraged through, for example, focusing on the similarities between students from different religions, or between those with a religion or faith and those with none. This could include supporting greater dialogue and conversation between groups including helping staff and students learn how to be more confident in talking to each other.

- Ensuring there are no discrepancies within or between departments in regard to how faith is recognised, acknowledged, valued, or supported so that students across the University have an equitable student experience.

- Departments and programmes should offer more sessions that allow for greater cross-cultural understanding. In addition, opportunities for greater inter-faith mixing amongst staff and students should be developed as this will result in a "united community", alongside "sessions for students where we encourage people to talk about their lived experiences".

References

AdvanceHE (2020), *Equality+ higher education. Students statistical report 2020.* Available online at [2020-08 AdvHE stats_report_students_FINAL_12mb_1603451622.pdf](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk). Accessed August 27, 2021.

Codiroli Mcmaster, N. (2020). *Research Insight: Religion and Belief in UK Higher Education. Analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student data for 2017/18.* AdvanceHE. Available online at [Research Insight: Religion and Belief in UK Higher Education | Advance HE (advance-he.ac.uk)](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk). Accessed August 27, 2021.

Appendix 1: Documentary analysis

Appendix 1a: Documents and website pages explicitly about faith, religion, or belief

Document/Webpage URL	Religious observance and assessments https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/10111/examinations_and_assessment/1274/religious_observance_and_exams	Prayer and Contemplation https://equality.leeds.ac.uk/support-and-resources/religion-and-belief/prayer-and-contemplation/	Requests for flexibility from students and staff on grounds of religion https://equality.leeds.ac.uk/support-and-resources/religion-and-belief/responding-to-requests-for-flexibility-from-students-and-staff-on-grounds-of-religion/	Financial support for Muslim students https://www.leeds.ac.uk/info/130530/student_loans_and_bursaries/18/financial_support_for_muslim_students
Authors	Academic life department.	Student support and Equality & inclusion unit	Student support and Equality & inclusion unit	Not specified/ University
Mention of faith/religion/ belief/lack of (FRBLO)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Key messages, if any, about FRBLO	- If students are unable to attend assessments on religious days, they should contact the assessments and progress team by completing a "Notification of religious commitments" form by a certain date. Submissions after this date are difficult to consider. - Every effort will be made to avoid setting assessments on these days, but they may need to go ahead if there is no alternative.	- Close to/ campus locations for prayer and contemplation with brief directions and opening times (including washing facilities before prayer) - The university will accommodate for regular prayer breaks however the individual must make the necessary arrangements to catch up on any missed work. This includes assessments (linked to source 1). - Prayer spaces/ washing facilities on/around campus are clearly	- Highlights the need for students to request special consideration for any time off or flexibility requests from the examination office. - Acknowledges that the university has legal obligations to not treat individuals unfavourably on the grounds of religious belief or non-belief and ensure that people are not disadvantaged as a result. - A "Some practical suggestions" section provides steps schools can take if they receive a	- Explains the concept of 'riba' in the Islamic religion. It is explained within a student finance context and acknowledges Islamic scholars' shared views on the matter. - Islamically compliant financing options are suggested, and government student loans are explained (how the interest works and why this might be unacceptable for many Muslim students). - Mentions that in 2016 Secretary of State awarded

		located with instructions on how to get there. - Chaplaincy/advisor contact details are listed for those of faith.	flexibility request. These include doing research around relevant religions/beliefs, encouraging people to allow an open line of communication, or bringing in an external person to facilitate a discussion or presentation. - There is a final section called "Benefiting everyone". This section talks about how flexibility will benefit people from all groups including those with childcare or caring responsibilities, disability-related reasons, or busy schedules. The university fully accepts that being flexible for every single person is impossible however with advance notice, the more likely they will be able to plan and less likely to discriminate inadvertently against any one group.	students with an alternative payment system however no date has yet been set for when it will be available. - Alternative options and consequences cover the following: - The Leeds hardship fund is an alternative funding source however students who decide not to take out a government student loan cannot access this. In addition, trusts and charities specifically exclude some students who are entitled to a maintenance loan regardless of whether they have taken it or not. There are many other disadvantages such as no interest-free overdraft facilities on bank accounts and welfare benefits entitlements.
Tone when referring to FRBLO	- Formal – use of forms and official submissions to allow rearranging of assessments - Informative – dates of Ramadan and when the overlap will be - Sincere – university will make every effort to ensure exams are in the morning (for fasting students or not on a holy day/Sabbath) and signposts further information relating to Ramadan on the Support and Wellbeing website.	- Helpfully outlines prayer locations and sources of faith-based support	- Focuses a lot on making sure the university does not treat anyone group unfavourably, which comes across as very aware of the importance of inclusivity.	- Written in the third person which makes it sound less personal. - The warning section mentioned above almost makes the student feel like they must take the loan to not miss out on extra funding.

Any key messages missing (e.g.: freedom of speech)		- There is no specific outline on how one can go about making "necessary arrangements", putting the pressure on the student to figure it out.	- There is a lack of transparency on who oversees these requests and how religiously literate they are. This can be very important in ensuring that the requests are handled with the appropriate attitude and knowledge.	-
Any specified religions and in what context Are any missing?	- Judaism: Considers Sabbath - Islam: Considers Eid celebrations and a specific section on Ramadan. - More generalised phrase "holy days or religious festival".	- Only Islamic, Christian, and Jewish prayer/chaplaincies are explicitly specified, however, there is a non-specified faith chaplaincy link as well.	- No mention of specific religions however considers non-religious related groups such as disability-related, care responsibility, and those with a busy schedule.	- Specifically mentions Muslim students.
Explicit mention of who has responsibility for actions or just general 'we will…'	- If students are unable to attend assessments, then "please tell the Assessments & Progress Team by completing the Notification of religious commitments form…" - "The university will make every effort to avoid arranging assessments on a Sabbath or holy day and to schedule assessments during Ramadan and Eid celebrations in the morning…"	- Mostly 3rd person with contact details for further information.	- "We" - The practical suggestions place responsibility on those receiving requests to ensure it is being handled appropriately.	- No university-based support and since it has been written like a fact sheet, much of the responsibility is placed on the student (with not many viable options)
Cross reference to other strategies/documents Do they feel connected?	-	- Similar advice in the Feeling at home in Leeds source	- Mentions exam arrangements highlighted in the religious observance and assessments source.	- This has strong links to the Access to student success strategy 2025, many students miss out on a high-quality education based on their beliefs and the lack of urgency to make it available.
Extra comments to help with	- Is there a difference between Post/under grad procedures?	- How does the presence of multifaith/specific faith prayer	- Is flexibility around faith treated the same as for other reasons	- Should other belief groups be included in this?

interview questions	- Do you know what the process is once you have sent a request? - Effort on who? Student or university to act?	rooms make you feel at university? - Are contemplation rooms, especially for those who do not have a faith/religion highlighted enough? Would it promote a more inclusive environment?	(busy/disabled/caring responsibilities)?	- Are Muslim students the only group who find this a barrier to their success at university?

Appendix 1b: Documents and website pages explicitly about faith, religion, or belief

Document/Webpage URL	Feeling at home in Leeds https://www.leeds.ac.uk/city-life/doc/feeling-home-leeds	Wellbeing and support https://www.leeds.ac.uk/masters-campus-life/doc/wellbeing-support	Mental health and wellbeing https://wsh.leeds.ac.uk/mental-health-wellbeing/doc/mental-health-and-wellbeing	Contacts https://students.leeds.ac.uk/contacts/
Authors	Not specified/ University	Not specified/ University	Not specified/ University	Not specified/ University
Mention of faith/religion/ belief/lack of (FRBLO)	YES	YES	YES	YES
Key messages, if any, about FRBLO	- States that Leeds is a very multi-cultural city with over 85 languages being spoken. - It is easy to find places of worship across the city and the university chaplain represents different faiths who can help students whether they follow a religion or not. - The international food shopping section states that shops and restaurants offer kosher and halal food.	- Page covers a small paragraph at the end of the page highlighting a link to the prayer and quiet contemplation page and a link to the university's faith societies. - Also reassures students can be confident in practising their faith if you follow one.	- Similar to the previous pages with contact details and reassurance that support can be provided: "Universities Chaplaincy - Chaplains come from different faith backgrounds and are here for staff of all faiths and all world views. For remote pastoral and spiritual support by appointment or virtual drop-in, contact chaplaincy@leeds.ac.uk (with your best availability, name and contact details, or leave a message on 0113 343	- Includes the chaplaincy details under the Support and Wellbeing heading

			5071) or Muslim Adviser Farhat Yaqoob on 07713 707 857 or f.yaqoob@leeds.ac.uk. If you are a staff member in crisis you can call our 'out of hours' number 07780 613 862. They will respond to you as soon as they can. "	
Tone when referring to FRBLO	- Very welcoming to make students feel safe when moving to university (understandably).	- Quite supportive, half a sentence but still feels like the university has acknowledged student concerns about practising faith and providing reassurance. Would be great to expand on how many students are from different faiths/beliefs to provide evidence for the claim.		- Non-applicable
Any key messages missing (e.g.: freedom of speech)	- Although support is offered through the chaplaincy, simply stating that there are halal and kosher options in the city is unhelpful as the student must now try and find them themselves. This can be difficult for a student who is unfamiliar with Leeds or living in the UK.	- No mention of other rights such as freedom of speech. - Quite vague as to what is the exact meaning of "following your beliefs in Leeds" mean? Are some religious practices not allowed/unaccepted?	- Lack of inclusion of more specific religions, there are other chaplains specific to other faiths which haven't been mentioned. This could have promoted more inclusivity and make students belonging to those faiths more accepted and seen.	- Non-applicable
Any specified religions and in what context Are any missing?	- No specified religion mentioned in the faith section however halal and kosher food are mentioned in the international food shopping section.	- No specified religion.	- Mentions Muslim faith advisor however not any others specifically even though there are dedicated chaplains for various faiths.	- All inclusive
Explicit mention of	- University chaplaincy	- Not applicable	- Not applicable	- Not applicable

who has responsibility for actions or just general 'we will…'				
Cross reference to other strategies/documents Do they feel connected?				
Extra comments to help with interview questions	- Does the availability of faith-approved food choices make you feel more comfortable at university? - Does seeing people with visible markers of faith make you feel more at ease?	- Master's section: does this need more expanding on in more detail. The undergraduate/international pages had more detail on them.	- As a student, are you aware of a chaplaincy catered to your specific belief? - If you have accessed the chaplaincy service during your studies, do you feel that 1) you are confident in the religious literacy of the chaplain on your specific religion/faith/belief/lack of faith 2) it has positively impacted your university experience 3) in what ways? - These questions can also apply to being a part of a faith society.	- Interesting to see faith services being put within the wellbeing category- is this suggesting that faith support contributes to student wellbeing and therefore their success at university?

Appendix 1c: Other key institutional policy and strategy documents

Document/Webpage URL	**Access on student success strategy 2025** https://ses.leeds.ac.uk/download/downloads/id/1832/access_and_student_success_strategy.pdf	**Student Data 2021** https://equality.leeds.ac.uk/equality-data/student-data/student-data-2021/
Authors	Not specified/ University	Equality & inclusion unit
Mention of faith/religion/belief/lack of (FRBLO)	NO	YES
Key messages, if any, about FRBLO	Not mentioned	- 3 documents discussing 1) undergraduate classifications 2)registered students and 3)admissions
Tone when referring to FRBLO	Non-applicable	Non-applicable
Any key messages missing (e.g.: freedom of speech)	- The strategy outlines how the university will work towards creating equal opportunities amongst all groups at the university. - It highlights that they will provide access to a range of support services to provide accessible and inclusive teaching, cater to diverse needs and ensure that all students are able to participate fully in induction events regardless of background /commitments. The concept of students of faith/ lack of and the associated barriers to student success would have been beneficial here.	- Unfortunately, the classifications document only covered age, disability, ethnicity, and gender. - This would have been great to use if faith/belief was included as we could have been able to see any links between student success (academically) and different faith groups. As a result, it would have allowed us to see if there was any specific initiatives/support for those students that could have contributed to their academic success and set recommendations to make it widespread across the university.
Any specified religions and in what context Are any missing?	Not mentioned	- A wide range of religions was included on the table.
Explicit mention of who has responsibility for actions or just general 'we will…'	- University-wide effort so mostly non-specific "We" statements	- Non-applicable
Cross reference to other strategies/documents Do they feel connected?		

| Extra comments to help with interview questions | - Does having a visible marker of faith increase the chances of a negative experience at university/ harder to earn a place in higher roles at the university?
- Does having a visible marker of faith increase/decrease the level of confidence students have to feel comfortable in their environment and hence push themselves for roles within and outside academics? | - The closest to religious indications on the classifications document is ethnicity. Although unreliable as we cannot assume certain ethnicities are more/less religious than others within the university, it is generally found that those from BAME backgrounds tend to be more religiously involved than their white counterparts. This leads to a weak connection between the attainment of these groups and their religion/faith however this information needs to be available explicitly in order to make a more reliable comparison. |

Appendix 2: Demographics

Appendix 2a: Student participant demographics

Student Number	Age	Faith	Gender	Course
1	20	Muslim	Male	Dental Surgery Undergraduate
2	23	Muslim	Female	Dental Surgery Undergraduate
3	21	Muslim	Female	Dental Surgery Undergraduate
4	21	Muslim	Female	Dental Surgery Undergraduate
5	21	Hindu	Female	Dental Surgery Undergraduate
6	21	Muslim	Female	Dental Surgery Undergraduate
7	20	Agnostic	Female	Media and Communications Undergraduate

Appendix 2b: Staff participant demographics

Staff Number	Gender	Faith	Job role
1	Male	Christian	Student Experience
2	Female	Unitarian	Academic in School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science
3	Male	Christian	Student Support
4	Female	Christian	Associate Professor in School of Accounting and Finance
5	Male	No religion	Student Placement
6	Female	Christian	Management Division of Business School
7	Male	Roman Catholic	Global Opportunities
8	Female	Christian	Learning Enhancement
9	Female	Atheist	Education Lead and Inclusive Practice Lead
10	Female	No religion	Intercalation Tutor in Healthcare

Appendix 3: Interview questions

Appendix 3a: Student interview questions

1. What is your course and level, gender, faith, age?
2. How did you practice your faith before coming to university?
   a. Has this changed since you arrived and if so, in what ways and why?
3. What ways have you noticed (if any) religion/faith/belief being recognised around campus/course/accommodation?
4. What expectations did you have about religion or belief on campus before coming to university in relation to recognition, visibility, support etc?
5. Are you aware of a chaplaincy service or prayer/contemplation room to practice your belief/faith?
   a. Have you accessed it? If not, why?
6. How much do you feel faith/belief support at university contributes to:
   a. your wellbeing during your studies?
   b. your academic success?
   c. your sense of belonging?
7. Have you ever faced difficulties practising your faith in university? How so?

8.   Do you feel there is enough variety in food options that cater to your religious needs?

9.   Have you ever applied for an absence request for religious/faith purposes? If so, did you understand the process of how the final decision was reached?

10.   Do you find yourself feeling confident to apply for extracurricular roles or responsibilities at university (this is not limited to just course-related roles)?

11.   To what extent do you feel having/not having a faith has influenced your success as a student? This can be either social, academic, or related to employability opportunities.

12.   What policies are you aware of that relate to students with a religion or belief on campus?
- a.   Have you read any of them or drawn on the information in them?
- b.   If so, please describe why and how?

13.   Overall, how would you describe your experience at university in terms of practising your faith/religion?

14.   Do you feel that the university has an appropriate approach towards supporting students with a religion/belief? Why?
- a.   What should it do differently?

15.   From your responses, do you have any suggestions or recommendations you feel would improve the current system/policies?

Appendix 3b: Staff interview questions

16.   What is your role in the university, gender, and faith?

17.   How would you describe your level of religious literacy, (that is your ability to recognise the importance of religion, and also the ability to question and critically engage with religious claims, without accepting them as absolute truth)?
- a.   Have you engaged in any activity to increase your religious literacy? if so has this happened at the University?

18.   Do you feel confident about discussing religion and belief with your students?
- a.   Do you have any examples of where you have done so through choice, or have been required to do so as it has been raised by a student?

19.   What ways have you noticed (if any) religion/faith/belief being recognised around campus/course/accommodation?

20.   Are you involved in any faith-based support available for students?

21.   To what extent are students' faiths/beliefs considered when your department is designing sessions/classes/events/student support activities?

22.   How do you consider religion or belief when thinking about building students' sense of belonging?

23.   What policies are you aware of that relate to students with a religion or belief on campus?
- a.   Have you read any of these, or drawn on the information in them?
- b.   If so please describe why and how you did so?

24.   Have you had any experience with absence requests due to faith reasons?
- a.   Are you aware of the process/people involved in the decision-making process for such requests?

25.   Do you feel flexibility around faith is dealt with the same way as other reasons such as busy schedules/disabilities/caring responsibilities?

26.   Do you feel that the University has an appropriate approach towards supporting students with a religion/belief?
- a.   why do you think this?
- b.   What could or should it do differently?

27. From your responses, do you have any suggestions or recommendations you feel would improve the current system/policies?