



Briefing on Jewish religious observances

This briefing aims to raise staff awareness around Judaism and to deliver guidance for supporting staff and students practicing the Jewish faith at the university. It provides practical information on the significance of Jewish festivals and holy days, what they involve and what arrangements we have in place on our campus. It also includes contact details of relevant staff and additional resources for more information, advice and guidance.

It is important to remember not all Jews practice the same level of religious observance so each of their requests should be dealt with on a case by case basis, as what is suitable for one individual may not be suitable for another.

The Equality Policy Unit has also developed a range of other guides on the major faith communities in the UK, as well as a religious festival & events calendar. They are available at www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/for-staff/resources-and-toolkits and www.equality.leeds.ac.uk/festival-events-calendar

Purpose and significance

For the fully observant Jew, Jewish law or *Halacha* provides a central model for how to lead an affirmed spiritual life. This means that it is not possible for the observant Jew simply to waive, for example, observance of the Sabbath. However, in most cases reasonable adjustments will mean that there is no conflict between being a fully observant Jew and a fully contributing member of the workforce.

Key points

1. One of the most common workplace or study place adjustments for Jewish employees and students concerns working on the Sabbath and during festivals.

The Jewish Sabbath (*Shabbat*) is the Jewish day of rest. It starts Friday afternoon, about one hour before dusk and lasts for approximately 25 hours, until after dark the following day. As daylight hours vary, the beginning and end times of the Sabbath also vary throughout the year. Jewish law requires Jews to refrain from various actions of 'work' on the Sabbath.

In the winter months, this could affect teaching staff or students with classes or exams on Friday afternoons, as well as on Saturdays. For someone working a Monday-Friday standard working week, Sabbath observance requires leaving work early on a Friday afternoon (varies throughout the year). For employees needing to complete a set number of hours in a week, this can easily be made up by working earlier or later on other days of the week to compensate. Please be mindful that as the Sabbath requires a

minimum time for preparation, many students and staff might need to leave one to two hours before dusk on Friday afternoon.

2. Similar restrictions exist for major festivals (see **Table 1**), the Judaism prohibits various activities including but not limited to writing, drawing, the use of electrical devices, the use of telephones, the use of public transport, driving, and any commercial transactions.

Jewish festivals can normally be easily accommodated. Festivals may be taken as annual or unpaid leave ¹and consequently should cause little disruption as they are taken in short bursts rather than in long blocks.

3. Some observant Jewish men and women may have specific requirements regarding their dress. Some Jewish men always cover their heads with a skull cap (also known as a 'yarmulka' 'kappel' or 'kippah'). Some observant Jewish women will wish to dress modestly, which may include not wearing trousers, short skirts or short sleeves. Some married Jewish women will also cover their hair, with a scarf, hat or wig.
4. Observant Jews pray three times a day, in the morning, in the afternoon and in the evening. This can take place in a variety of locations including the workplace. As a manager, designating a room for prayer or a quiet space is good practice. Jews also observe five days of fasting throughout the year. Managers are advised to demonstrate empathy, sensitivity and understanding in support of those who are fasting.
5. Jews who observe the dietary laws are required to eat only Kosher food and consequently may refuse foods labelled 'vegetarian' or 'vegan'. Good practice is to always ask staff and students about their dietary requirements when food is being provided.
6. Jewish students and staff will take personal responsibility for managing their religious observances. Since there are varying levels of religious observance, an individual's requirements should be discussed with them on a personal basis.

What provision is the University making?

The University has many Jewish students and staff. We are very keen to provide a safe and inclusive environment, facilities and arrangements to ensure that they are able to practice their faith alongside their studying, working and living on campus. The arrangements we have in place this year are:

1. Prayer and contemplation facilities are available at various locations on or near campus. The main Jewish prayer area currently available is at the Jewish Chaplaincy, Hillel Student Centre, 2 Springfield Mount. Opening hours are from 9am-6pm daily. For additional information please refer to the 'Prayer and contemplation' guidance found at <https://equality.leeds.ac.uk/support/prayer-and-contemplation/>

¹ This should be in accordance with the University's annual leave policy

2. The University's Chaplaincy Team offers support to staff and students. Further information about the University's chaplaincy service is available at <http://unichaplaincy.org.uk/accessing-support-university-leeds/>
3. The University's Jewish Chaplain, Rabbi Eli Magzimof as well as Mrs. Rivka Magzimof are offering talks, information, advice, guidance and support. They can be contacted on 078 151 08260, 077 912 92948 or at eli@mychaplaincy.co.uk.
4. Advice, support and guidance is also available to managers, staff and students from the Equality Policy Unit on (0113) 343 6973 or at equality@leeds.ac.uk

Table 1 Major Jewish festivals 2018-2019.

Festival	Time of Year	Number of Festival Days
New Year (Rosh Hashannah)	10 September	Two days (one day for Progressive communities)
	11 September	
The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)	19 September	One Day
Tabernacles (Sukkot)	24 September	Two sets of two days separated by five semi-festive days (two sets of one day for Progressive communities)
	25 September	
	26-30 September (Intermediate days)	
Passover (Pesach)	20 April	Two sets of two days separated by four semi-festive days (two sets of one day for Progressive communities)
	21 April	
	22-25 April (Intermediate days)	
	26 April	
	27 April	
Pentecost (Shavuot)	9 June	Two days (one day for Progressive communities)
	10 June	

Guidance for managers for supporting staff

Staff will manage their own Jewish observances. Practices may vary between individuals due to health, travel and other personal circumstances. Individual members of staff may make different types of leave requests, for example, to work half-days and/or shorter working weeks to enable them to observe the Sabbath or other religious festivals. Others may request more flexible working

arrangements. Requests should be managed in line with all existing University HR policies.

Managers are advised to demonstrate empathy, sensitivity and understanding to balance supporting our staff to manage their religious commitments alongside ensuring we meet all our business needs. Managers may otherwise wish to consider meeting times over these periods which enables the contribution of most staff.

The calendar of major Jewish festivals will be useful when planning activities like staff development, away days and in drawing up work schedules/timetables. Managers will be able to anticipate significant dates that staff may want to take as leave. It is the responsibility of line managers to find out from staff, what their religious practices are so the University can begin to assess how well any particular needs they might have are being met.

Guidance for staff working with Jewish students

Students will manage their own Jewish observances. As a member of staff please refer to this document when setting dates for exams, core assessments, field trips, arranging placements, time-tabling key lectures, arranging interviews, seminars and other programme activities. In general, please be mindful that scheduling any of these activities on Friday afternoon/evenings and weekends may conflict with Jewish student's observances. In such a case, every effort should be made to provide alternatives upon request.

Consulting with students who study in your department will be important to establish the extent of their religious observance. This can form the basis of significant religious dates to avoid, as far as it is possible, when developing programme timetables. It would also be an opportunity to find out whether students have other religious or cultural needs and how well these are currently being met within the faculty.

Further information, advice or support

Students, staff and visitors are welcome to contact any of the following student/staff members for any further information or enquiries:

Jewish Chaplain	Rabbi Eli Magzimof, eli@mychaplaincy.co.uk . 078 151 08260
Leeds Chabad Lubavitch Student Centre	http://www.leedsuchabad.org/
Universities' Chaplaincy in Leeds	chaplaincy@leeds.ac.uk 0113-343-5071
Kyle Griffith Equality and Inclusion Advisor	k.griffith@leeds.ac.uk 0113-343-8582 or at equality@leeds.ac.uk
The Board of Deputies of British Jews	The national representative body of the Jewish community, <i>Employer's Guide to Judaism</i> https://www.bod.org.uk/resources/

Kyle Griffith
Equality Policy Unit
September 2018

Rabbi Eli Magzimof
University Jewish Chaplaincy
Leeds & W Yorkshire Chaplain



'everyone included, everyone involved'



University Jewish
Chaplaincy 
Building student communities.
Invigorating Jewish life.