

TACKLING **Religion or** **Belief-Related** **Harassment and** **Hate Incidents**

A guide for higher education providers

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Social Relations

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Introduction

Higher education is not just a context for formal, curricula-based learning. Students also learn from their wider university experiences, as they meet and interact with people from different backgrounds, beliefs and values. The university and college experience helps students become people who respect the social diversity around them and thrive in religiously diverse and multicultural environments.

Higher education providers have a duty to provide safe and secure environments for formal and informal learning. An important aspect of this is to act proactively in order, as far as possible, to prevent harassment and hate incidents and to provide mechanisms for dealing with them if they occur.

This guidance document focuses specifically on religion or belief-related harassment and hatred and is informed by the 'Tackling religion-based hate crime on the multi-faith campus' project, carried out at Coventry University as one of 11 projects funded by the Office for Students (OfS) within its Catalyst initiative to tackle religion-based hate crime and support student safety and wellbeing.

This guidance was developed in consultation with the other 10 projects, Advance HE (the Higher Education sector charitable body) and the Church of England's Education Office (with expertise and responsibility for a large number of university chaplains).

The guidance helps to unpack the (sometimes complex – see Appendix 1) terminologies, categories and legal distinctions relevant to work in this area. It offers advice on how higher education providers can set up and promote an effective reporting system for incidents of religion or belief-harassment and hate. This can then inform institutional action and/or referral to external agencies such as the police. It offers an example that higher education providers can interpret and apply in ways that suit their contexts.¹

1. The guidance was produced by the academic team (Prof. Kristin Aune (lead), Prof. Paul Weller, Dr Sariya Cheruvallil-Contractor, Dr Jane Osmond, Lucy Peacock), in consultation with project working group (Tochukwu Ajare, Serazul Alam, Jane Arthur, Kusminder Chahal, Sadie Chana, Caron McKenna, Abimbola Ojo, Blessed Pepple, Nicole de Souza, Amber Taroni, Yasir Yeahia) and a steering committee of senior university managers, for whose support we are very grateful. Expert advice was also offered by Kirsty Kift, Alistair Logan and Rena Reeves from Coventry University, Jess Moody from Advance HE, Garry Neave from the Church of England Education Office and the other ten projects in the OfS Tackling religion-based hate crime network. This guidance has drawn on the document 'Recording harassment/hate incidents: The journey towards an online Case Management System June 2019' produced as part of a different OfS Catalyst-funded project as a baseline, and has adapted it to specifically address religion-based harassment/hate incidents. The report can be found at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/resources-for-student-safety-and-wellbeing/coventry-university-2/>

While grateful for these contributions, overall responsibility for this document lies with the project team at Coventry. For further resources from Coventry's and the other 10 projects see <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-wellbeing-and-protection/resources-for-student-safety-and-wellbeing/>

1. Set up a governance structure.

Establish a structure and environment to address the issue. This could be a taskforce, committee or working group, and might be linked to existing groups, such as a welfare, equality or religion and belief working group.

An initial scoping exercise could consider factors such as decision making power, operational aims, expertise and timeframe, and use the considerations to determine the most appropriate structure to drive the group forward. For example, a working group of those most involved could meet monthly and a steering committee could meet quarterly. This structure should bring together different departments. Senior **institutional leaders and managers** should be involved, for example in a steering group, to embed the work in the institution and advocate for it with other senior managers to ensure it is prioritised. This group should include representation from equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), welfare and security departments and the SU. The group should define its objectives from the start.

A **project leader** (or leaders) is needed to manage the whole process. This could be an existing member of the institution's staff seconded to the task or who undertakes the role alongside other work (ideally they should not be a member of Students' Union (SU) staff, as the SU is a separate legal entity).

Working with religion and belief

Ensure people with religion or belief expertise are involved in governance structures – for example, representatives from an SU interfaith committee, religion or belief student societies, the chaplaincy and, where applicable, academics who teach and research religion or belief.

2. Use an online case management reporting system.

An online content management system or database enables students to tell the institution if they have experienced or witnessed harassment.

This might be designed from scratch, or if reporting mechanisms already exist, an existing reporting tool could be adapted or enhanced. One or more members of staff (ideally, a harassment advisor or case manager) operates this system, responding to reports when they come in. Carefully consider what staffing and support is needed for the effective introduction and operation of this system.

Over time, the institution can also analyse these reports to understand and respond better to incidents affecting its community. Students can report anonymously or give their name if they wish their report to be followed up. If a student decides to involve police later, their initial report can be made admissible in court.

- 1. Decide on the system's remit:** will it be just for student reports, or for staff reports too? Will it include reports from third parties about university students or staff?
- 2. Review options on the market** and invite teams to demonstrate their systems. If possible, choose suppliers who demonstrate understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion.² An in-house design by the university's IT department may be preferable. Unless a simple online survey form is used, funded via the institution's subscription to an online survey provider, the system will cost money³, so ask the steering committee how this can be funded, being prepared to write an application for funding if required.

2. The Report + Support system used by many universities is one example.

3. Costs vary from £10-£30k per year.

Ask your IT department to help select or design the best system and for a memorable URL, such as www.universityname.ac.uk/report or www.universityname.ac.uk/harassment. Ensure that students can report easily using a smartphone as well as a PC or laptop; consider whether you need an App and an 'exit quickly' button for students concerned about someone observing their online activity. Offer students an offline reporting option, for example telephoning the case manager or visiting an information desk.

3. **Purchase the system.** Factor in time for contract negotiation. The contract should include several cycles of revision and ability to adapt the system for new issues of concern. Consider asking a group of students to pilot the system to ensure it is student-user-friendly.

4. **Set up the case management system and online reporting tool.**

Your introductory web page should include:

- Legal definitions of harassment
- Carefully-constructed hypothetical case studies, to provide students with tangible examples of harassment
- Information and links to your student services or welfare department and the SU
- Information on the page about what to do in an emergency (call 999)
- Information about confidentiality and what will happen with the information reporters provide – for example, will it be used for analysis?
- Types of reports that can be made (anonymous or not).
- A clickable link to make a report.

Ask the reporter:

- If they would like to make an anonymous report, speak to an advisor or make a named report

- Contact details if they wish to be contacted
- Whether the incident has already been reported and to whom
- Details of the incident (where and what happened)
- Whether they believe it was motivated by prejudice against features of the victim's perceived identity (or are unsure about this). Ensure all protected characteristics mentioned in hate crime legislation (disability, race, religion, sexual orientation, transgender identity) are mentioned when students are asked to select likely motivations for their victimisation; we recommend including sex/gender, enabling students to report sexual harassment (misogynistic abuse is not yet legally classed as a hate crime).⁴
- Demographic data about the victim.

The final page should thank the reporter and offer contact details for sources of support, including the case managers and welfare staff. Examples of these reporting systems can be found via searching university websites.

Working with religion and belief

Ensure religion and belief are present in lists of protected characteristics and types of harassment and in any definitions of harassment or hate crime (see Appendix 1). When compiling lists for students to select from do not conflate two different protected characteristics e.g. 'race-religion'. Incidents can be motivated by one or more protected characteristics, so reporters should be able to select more than one.

4. Providers may wish to add the (mostly fuller) range of protected characteristics in the Equality Act: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity. They may also wish to add things that fall outside of that list but which are targeted by perpetrators, for example international student status, or bullying in general.

3. Employ a case manager or harassment advisor.

As Advance HE's evaluation of over 100 OfS Catalyst pilot projects advocates, a dedicated member of staff should be employed, for example as a case manager or harassment advisor.⁵

Prepare a business case, where needed, to explain why such a post is necessary and what it would cost.

Design the role. Consider department and office location, line management, hours, method of work (whether they will have a drop-in or appointments only, whether they will be available outside standard working hours). Consider the extent to which the case manager will offer support, advice and/or signposting. Consider the skills and attributes necessary, including advice or casework experience, experience in higher education, knowledge of equality and diversity policy, IT skills and communication skills.

Work with your HR department to **write the job description**. As with all job roles, take steps to ensure recruitment is as inclusive as possible and attracts a wide range of backgrounds. **Advertise the role and interview** shortlisted candidates.

As they begin work, ensure the organisation supports them to **undertake appropriate training**. The University of Leicester Centre for Hate Studies' online and in-person training on supporting victims of hate crime is one example.

Connect them with staff from relevant departments in your institution (e.g. welfare, the international office, the Students' Union) to whom students are likely to be referred for support, and **a network of staff undertaking similar work** in other higher education providers, perhaps in the same geographical region, who can provide advice and share learning.

5. H. Baird et al (2019) *Evaluation of Safeguarding Students Catalyst Fund Projects: Summative Evaluation Report for Office for Students*
<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/catalyst-fund-projects-evaluation/>

Develop a **signposting/referral pathways document** indicating what the case manager should do in the different situations students present. This should include mapping out the institution's different departments and how they interact, including:

- Student services
- Accommodation providers
- Security or protection departments
- Disciplinary systems
- Faculties

Consult your governance groups on its content. Review and amend it regularly – it should be a living document.

Working with religion and belief

Consider whether to appoint a **case manager with expertise in religion or belief** (useful if your institution has larger than typical proportions of minority religions). When you advertise the role, consider sharing the advertisement with appropriate religion and belief organisations.

Ensure the case manager understands the **religion and belief demographics** of the institution: which religion or belief groups are present. Your equality and diversity or student records team should have student religion and belief demographics statistics for the university. Compare these with the national picture (Appendix 3).

Meet as many of the **university chaplains or faith advisors** as possible, inform each other about your roles, and share your experiences of working with students, creating a good working relationship to enable the case manager to refer students to chaplains with confidence.

Ensure the case manager is aware of the **changing social, policy and legal landscape** relating to religion or belief-related harassment or hate (Appendix 1).

The reports the case manager will receive may concern what could ultimately be found by a court to be religion-related hate *crime*, but will likely more often concern religion or belief-related prejudice, discrimination and harassment. Some will trigger protections under the Equality Act 2010 and/or Northern Ireland equality legislation. Discrimination and prejudice are problems because of the harm they can do to individuals and to peaceful relations between different student groups, and because negative attitudes to religion and belief groups can fuel hate crime.

Consider how you will deal with reports of discrimination/prejudice that do not appear to meet legal definitions for treatment as potential harassment or hate crime but which nevertheless cause harm to the victim. For example, work with your chaplaincy to run educational or interfaith activities that foster good relations between different groups. **Consider how you will support case managers – who are unlikely to be in a position to offer legal advice – to navigate the different signposting pathways around illegal hate crime and other forms of hate incident.**

Ensure the referral pathways document includes **links to the chaplaincy and organisations with expertise on religion or belief-based hate incidents**, such as Tell Mama (for Islamophobia) and Community Security Trust (for antisemitism). Include True Vision's list of organisations other than the police, and their guidance on reporting to the police.⁶

6. http://report-it.org.uk/organisations_that_can_help#race_or_religion and http://report-it.org.uk/racist_or_religious_hate_crime1

4. Train staff and students.

Encourage staff and students to undertake training on understanding and responding to harassment and hate and consider whether such training should be mandatory.

There are several options:

Training on **equality and diversity and harassment or bullying**: this is often offered within institutional staff development programmes.

Bystander training: The Coventry University Online Student Bystander Training module is free and can be accessed here:

<https://openmoodle.coventry.ac.uk/login/signup.php>

- Sign up for an account
- Click the link sent to your email address
- Type Bystander in the search box
- Click on Bystander Training
- Use enrolment key: bystander365!

Coventry University has also developed free face-to-face bystander training materials: contact Dr Jane Osmond, arx162@coventry.ac.uk

Alternatively, you could **develop your own training**:

- A 5-minute presentation to deliver at the start of student classes
- An hour-long face-to-face staff workshop developed with the human resources department
- An online training module

Short videos and guidelines are available from University of Cambridge's 'Breaking the Silence' campaign.

Hate crime training: The University of Leicester runs online and in-person training, with online modules on 'Supporting victims of hate crime', 'Hate crime in higher education' and 'Tackling religiously-motivated hate crime'.⁷

Working with religion and belief

Explore **co-producing religion and belief training with colleagues responsible for equality and diversity or student experience, or your Students' Union**, to ensure that harassment reporting related to religion and belief is included in their training. Consider involving academic staff from the theology and religious studies departments. Involve students with different religion or belief perspectives in producing this training.⁸

Invite an external organisation specialising in religion and belief (for example, the Faith & Belief Forum, the Union of Jewish Students or the Federation of Islamic Student Societies, Belieforama) or a chaplain to deliver **religion and belief diversity and anti-discrimination training**.

Ensure **training materials you create include discussion of religion or belief-related harassment** alongside other kinds of harassment. Use examples from typical scenarios, ensuring examples reflect the range of religions and beliefs in the student body.

7. <https://le.ac.uk/hate-studies/training>

8. For ideas on working with students see: <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/student-engagement-through-partnership#section-4>

5. Advertise harassment reporting to students and staff.

Seek support from the university's **marketing and communications staff**.

Consider having a **launch event** for the case management system, accompanied by publicity material.

For staff:

- Create a list of relevant staff and departments to contact (including academics, building managers and student accommodation providers).
- Agree with your governance groups the most effective ways of communicating with them (e.g. via an online announcement, a newsletter, via Deans or Head of Schools or Faculty, via face-to-face presentations at staff induction).

For students:

- Work with the SU and student services departments (and if possible, student religion and belief groups) to agree a strategy for awareness raising at student induction.
- Deliver presentations to student course representatives.
- Book a stall and give out flyers about harassment reporting in relevant buildings and events (e.g. during hate crime awareness week).
- Run a campaign to encourage harassment reporting, producing advertising material such as posters (on plasma screens and on paper), banners and pens.
- Display posters and banners in buildings that are most frequently used by students
- Use the institution's and the SU's electronic communication channels, including social media.

Consider **targeting advertising to international students**, for example translating posters into languages spoken by the largest groups of students, displayed in buildings frequently used by international students. Ensure messages given to international students are informative (e.g. outlining the rights and protections that exist in the UK) and reassuring. Student peer support schemes, such as buddy schemes, may assist with this. The institution's international office can advise on this.

Working with religion and belief

Strike a balance between focusing on religion and belief-related harassment in general, and using specific examples that relate to specific religion or belief groups. Consider highlighting the major issues on your campus (e.g. if Islamophobia or antisemitism is the main problem) but acknowledge that other groups also face prejudice, discrimination, hate incidents and harassment. For example, atheists may experience hostility from religious students, or Catholic students from Protestant students, and vice versa. This is very important for minority groups who may feel isolated; they should be reassured that all kinds of religion or belief-based harassment (including hate incidents directed by religious people at people who are non-religious) will be taken seriously.

Consider using design and images that work for and are recognisable by a wide variety of religion or belief groups. If you use religion and belief symbols, ensure you use a wide range.

6. Use research and evaluation.

Doing some **research on students' attitudes and experiences of harassment** at the start of your work can be useful for establishing a baseline of data before implementing your interventions. This means that you can later undertake evaluations of the effectiveness of such interventions, which further shape your institution's response.

Before you do research, **apply for ethical approval** from the institution's research ethics committee, who will review a draft of your survey or questions and ask you to explain how you will safeguard students' anonymity, rights and data. Working with researchers in your institution will help you navigate this process.

Survey your students, and/or conduct focus groups, to ascertain their knowledge, attitudes, experiences of and experiences of witnessing harassment related to religion or belief and other protected characteristics. Use an intersectional analysis to understand how students navigate different forms of privilege and disadvantage (e.g. related to ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic background or sexual orientation, as well as religion or belief). Consider accessibility in its widest sense for your research – consider student groups that are often less prioritised, such as distance or blended learners, part-time students, study abroad students, mature students and students at smaller campuses or partner colleges. Online surveys work well (onlinesurveys.ac.uk is a good option as most universities subscribe to this and it is GDPR compliant) and paper versions can be useful too (e.g. returned via an envelope or secure box in your Students' Union or chaplaincy).

Learn from the issues that arise and tailor interventions accordingly. For example, if you find people from one religious or belief group are much more likely to be victims of harassment, consider a campaign focused on that issue. Statistics or quotations could be used as a basis for an awareness-raising campaign and discussed in steering or working groups to explore the best way to respond.

Evaluate the interventions afterwards. For example, ask which parts of your campaign were the most effective in raising awareness of the reporting system, whether students are aware how to report religion or belief-related hate incidents to the institution, whether they are aware the institution has a case manager for harassment reporting, and whether they are confident that a report would be taken seriously.

Agree with the governance groups how frequently to conduct research – for example, every two or three years.

Compare findings with other research, incorporating where relevant findings from surveys such as the National Student Survey or the International Student Barometer.

Working with religion and belief

Work with academics with expertise in religion and belief – ask your theology and religious studies department if you have one, or religion and belief specialists in other social science or humanities departments.

Reach out to the chaplaincy and student religion or belief societies, asking them to encourage their students to participate in the survey. If possible, involve student religion or belief societies in designing the research.

Appendix 1

Defining religion or belief-related harassment and hate incidents

The terminology of “religion or belief” is used in current equality and diversity law, policy and practice, to signal the inclusion of not only people of various religions as commonly understood, but also of those who orientate their lives according to developed non-religious perspectives, such as humanists and others. Because universities operate within an overall legal context that requires attention to diversity, equality and inclusion along these lines, our guidance uses this terminology.

The protections and requirements of equality and human rights law with regard to religion or belief do not differentiate between Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Druids and Pagans. Those holding what can be understood as non-religious beliefs are also protected when such beliefs – such as Humanism and Atheism – meet a range of case law criteria for such beliefs including, among other things, their cogency and seriousness.

Within this, in order to ensure that things that can impact negatively on students' lives and on higher education providers are not overlooked by failing to meet particular legal definition thresholds, our guidance refers to initiatives intended to tackle what we call “religion or belief-related harassment and hate incidents”. We believe this formulation comes closest to reflecting how students experience and, in reporting, articulate phenomena of these kinds. At the same time, it allows providers to undertake a more differentiated analysis of reported data, and for institutional actions and responses to be more appropriately calibrated in terms of the potential use of disciplinary procedures, measures for policy development, and/or onward referral to civil or criminal law.

A “**religion-related hate crime**” is, according to the Crown Prosecution Service, any criminal offence “which is perceived by the victim or any other person to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person’s religion or perceived religion” (for example, an assault or damage to property which is motivated by hostility to someone’s religion). ‘Perceived’ is important, as

people may be targeted by a perpetrator who mistakenly believes the person is of a particular religion (for example, a Sikh woman wearing a turban might be mistaken for a Muslim and subjected to anti-Muslim hate).

For something to be a hate *crime*, a criminal offence such as assault, harassment or criminal damage must have been committed alongside the expression of anti-religious hatred. If there is no separate criminal offence perpetrated, the incident is a "**religion-related hate incident**": any non-crime incident "which is perceived, by the victim or any other person, to be motivated by a hostility or prejudice based on a person's religion or perceived religion". Additionally, there is a specific offence of **stirring up religious hatred** (against people of religious or non-religious beliefs), via using threatening words, behaviour or material.⁹

9. There can be a fine line between speech and behaviour that uses satire, irony, humour or mockery within the rights of freedom of speech within the law, and speech and behaviour that a court would rule contravenes the law and stirs up religious hatred or constitutes a hate crime. Distinguishing between these is not always easy. Higher education providers have to uphold freedom of speech but they also have a legal duty to promote good relations between those of different beliefs.

Appendix 2

How common are religion or belief-related harassment and hate incidents in higher education?

Most students with a religion or belief have a positive experience of higher education and experience no religion or belief harassment or hate incidents.

Research commissioned by the Equality Challenge Unit (now Advance HE) found that, overall, 6% of students felt discriminated against or harassed because of their religion or belief.¹⁰ However, the figure was much higher for Jewish students (27%), Sikhs (17%) and Muslims (14%).

In relation to religion or belief hate incidents specifically, a National Union of Students (NUS) survey found that of the 18% of 9,229 respondents who had experienced verbal abuse or threats of violence, one in ten attributed it to a prejudice towards their religion or belief.¹¹ The Institute for Jewish Policy Research found that a fifth of 925 Jewish students they surveyed said they had been subjected to antisemitism that academic year, and a further third had witnessed an antisemitic incident on campus.¹² The NUS's 2017 Muslim Students' Survey found that of 578 further and higher education student respondents, one in three said they had experienced abuse or crime at their institution, and one in five had been subjected to verbal abuse in person.

10. P. Weller, T. Hooley & N. Moore (2011) *Religion and Belief in Higher Education: The experiences of staff and students*, London: Equality Challenge Unit, pp. 76-80

11. National Union of Students (2012) *No Place for Hate: Hate crimes and incidents in further and higher education: religion or belief*, London: National Union of Students, p.19

12. D. Graham & J. Boyd (2011) *Home and Away: Jewish Journeys towards Independence: Key findings from the 2011 National Jewish Student Survey*. London: Institute for Jewish Policy Research, pp.49-52

While most students do not experience religion or belief-related harassment or hatred, **fear** of harassment can affect students too. The NUS found:

“One in three respondents were fairly or very worried about experiencing verbal abuse, physical attacks, vandalism, property damage or theft relating to their religion or belief at their place of study. This response was gendered; women who wear a traditional Islamic garment (eg a hijab, niqab or jilbab) were significantly more likely to be very worried about being abused or attacked.”¹³

The NUS’s survey of 9,229 students in universities and FE colleges found that a fifth of students altered their behaviour, appearance or daily patterns because of fear of abuse, with proportions highest amongst Jews (43%), Hindus (37%), Buddhists (36%) and Muslims (36%).¹⁴ The survey also found that most students did not report hate incidents. Their Recommendations encourage universities to ‘Encourage reporting and maintain systematic documentation and data collection of hate incidents’ and adopt ‘flexible’ approaches including anonymous reporting.¹⁵

Research undertaken over a number of years by the academic staff working on this project suggests that four main types of religion and belief-related harassment and hate incidents happen in institutions providing higher education:

- By a **non-religious** person towards a religious person;
- **Inter-religious**: by a religious person towards someone of a different religion;
- **Intra-religious**: by a religious person towards someone of a different group within the same religion (e.g. a Protestant displaying hate towards a Catholic or a Sunni Muslim towards a Shia Muslim);
- By a **religious person** towards a non-religious person.

13. NUS (2018) *The Experience of Muslim Students in 2017-18*, London: National Union of Students pp.18-20

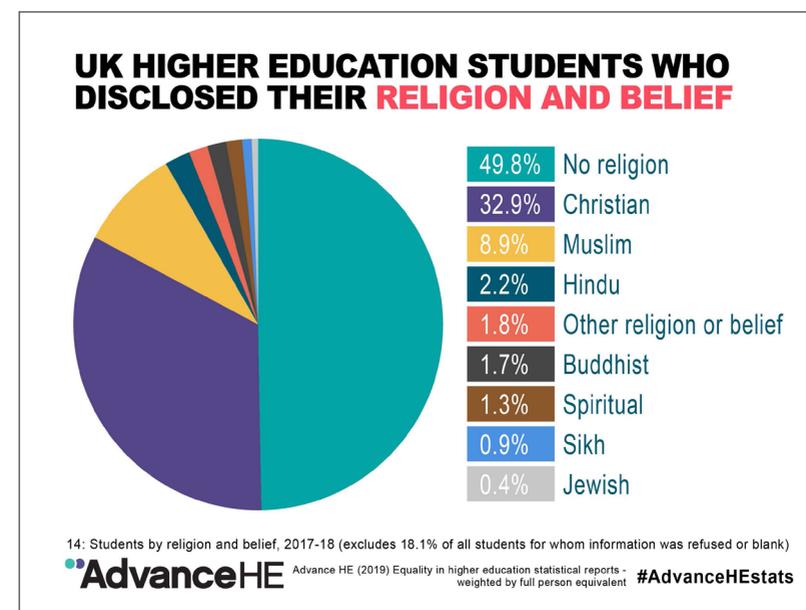
14. NUS (2012) pp. 14-16

15. NUS (2012) pp.43-45

Appendix 3

The student population in UK higher education, by religion or belief

Advance HE’s 2019 statistical report uses HESA data to show higher education students’ religion or belief demographics (accurate for 92.3% of students for the 2017/18 academic year). Students who disclosed their religion or belief (for 18.1% of students the information was refused or left blank) responded in this way:¹⁶



16. Full statistics are provided in Advance HE (2019) Equality and Higher Education: Students statistical report 2019, Advance HE, p.200
<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/equality-higher-education-statistical-report-2019>

