**University and College Union**

A recent report by the Equality Challenge Unit entitled, **Religion and belief in higher education: the experiences of staff and students** noted that’

*‘10% of students and 3.7% of staff identified that their religion or belief required them to wear specific dress or symbols. The majority of those who indicated that they have dress requirements are Muslim, Sikh and Jewish respondents. Members of staff and students feel that the campus is, in general, a place where individuals feel comfortable wearing symbols and religious dress. 85.6% of staff (118 respondents) indicated that they were able to fulfil their dress requirements without difficulty, and 79.3% of students (431 respondents) feel this to be the case. A greater proportion of female staff (92.4%) and students (81.5%) feel able to fulfil their dress requirements compared with male members of staff (77.1%) and students (76.9%).’[[1]](#footnote-1)*

UCU welcomes the variety of appearance brought by individual styles and choices. The wearing of items arising from particular cultural/religious norms is seen as part of this welcome diversity.

The only limitations to the above may occur when:

* Health and safety requirements may mean that for certain tasks specific items of clothing such as overalls, protective clothing etc need to be worn. If such clothing produces a conflict with an individual’s belief the issue will be sympathetically considered by the line manager with the aim of finding a satisfactory outcome.
* Clothing displaying slogans which are discriminatory (e.g. racist of sexist slogans) causes offence.
* There are particular legislative requirements. In Northern Ireland, dress or symbols that associate individuals with a particular religion or belief group are regulated. Items of clothing which may be related to sectarianism would be considered problematic and fall under the regulations i.e. football shirts. In the case of dress or symbols associated with other minority religion or belief groups, this was not seen to be an issue, and the dress code raised no specific issues about wearing other garments associated with minority religions.
* Particular educational ceremonies or practices, such as graduation, require the wearing of traditional outer garments. In such instances the institution would be expected to ensure that the traditional garb allows the wearer to fulfil their cultural or religious affiliations.
* Exam verification/identification may require institutions to conduct identity checks. Such checks must always be discreet and conducted in a manner which respects the religious, social or cultural norms of the individual.

1. Religion and belief in higher education: the experiences of staff and students p50 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)