

# Religious Observance and Examinations Policy

The SGUL policy that governs making adjustments to exams due to students' religious observance. Details of how a student should let us know if a religious festival clashes with their exams, how we can make adjustments and circumstances under which we might not be able to do so.

By the act of enrolment, students agree to abide by the current general regulations for students and programmes of study and other regulations, rules and codes of St. George's, University of London.

## 1. Exam security

SGUL wishes to preserve the highest standards of exam security.

To be fair to all our students it is important that each student is given equal revision time for an exam and that we do not offer any advantage by giving a student extra time to revise.

The assessments team also need to ensure that no student is offered an advantage because of any potential for other students to let them know what exam questions/tasks were set.

## 2. Different examinations run at SGUL

Different courses may demand different types of examination, such as:

- Essay based examinations paper.
- Questions based examinations paper.
- Objective Structured Clinical Examinations , known as OSCEs , which require students to undertake tasks such as: a physical examination of a patient, reading an X ray, a simulation on a lap top, etc. (See point 6.2).
- Objective Structured Practical Examinations, known as OSPEs , which involve practical tasks such as an examination in the Dissecting Room where specimens have been prepared by the Anatomy Team. (See Point 6.1).
- Oral exam known as a viva voce.

### **3. Time it takes to set the exam timetable**

It takes the institution approximately 4 months to co ordinate the exam schedule for one year and many different demands are taken into account when drawing up the timetable, including:

#### **3.1 Setting questions for examinations with a set pass mark**

Good examination questions must be able to discriminate between weak and strong candidates and all courses within SGUL. Most programmes at SGUL have a set pass mark, with the exception of the MBBS4 and MBBS5 (Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery). The MBBS programme has the pass mark set by recognised standard setting methods (e.g. borderline regression, angoff).

#### **3.2 Setting questions for MBBS examinations**

For the MBBS, the pass mark is different for each exam.

The pass mark is decided by a particular process called 'standard setting' which is used to calculate the pass mark for each paper. Each question is set by an academic.

Each question within an MBBS paper is sent to the relevant Responsible and/or Chief Examiner. The Responsible and Chief Examiner have overall responsibility for the setting of the paper.

After the questions are agreed, the paper must be then standard set by use of a recognised standard-setting method. For instance, in the Angoff standard setting method, each question is considered by an academic who decides how many marks a borderline candidate would achieve in that question.

Each paper is then sent to external examiners for their approval and for them to add comments if necessary. If there is any academic dispute over the questions, time is set aside for the academics to meet to agree the content of the question and/or the Angoff mark. Therefore the assessments team also need to set time aside in the timetable for any such meeting.

Once agreement is reached, the question paper is returned once again to the Chief Examiner for final approval.

SGUL does not use old exam papers and new unseen questions are set each year for each exam - although a small number of past questions may be used.

Exactly the same process applies to setting the examination questions for each station of each OSCE and each OSPE.

### **3.3 Number of students**

Approximately 4,600 students attend SGUL at any one time and most students are examined each year.

SGUL trains students to become medical professionals: nurses, physiotherapists, radiographers, doctors. SGUL also offers other degree courses such as biomedical sciences and biomedical informatics, as well as postgraduate degree courses and foundation degree courses. The university positively promotes interaction and respect between different medical professionals.

In the Interprofessional Foundation Programme, which is taken in the first term/semester; nursing, radiography, MBBS5, physiotherapy and biomedical students all follow the same course and they are also examined together.

### **3.4 Number of examinations**

SGUL runs over 250+ exams annually to a very strict timetable. For the majority of the year, exams run every working week, very often with more than one exam per day.

### **3.5 Revision time**

Before every exam students can be allocated a strict set period of time for revision. Therefore this time is also taken into account when the assessment team is planning the exams schedule.

### **3.6 Coordinating examiners, patients and actors**

Time constraints may be placed upon SGUL by the availability of examiners free to assess an exam at a particular time, as well as the number of real patients, or actors available to act as patients.

### **3.7 Length of time needed for examinations**

Written exam papers vary in length. The largest paper is taken by MBBS ( Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery) students. Their examinations taken at the end of each year (or semester) last 3 hours.

The length of time needed to undertake OSCEs also varies. For 1st and 2nd year students, OSCEs may last 1-2 days.

For Transition Year students and beyond, OSCEs may last 4-5 days – this is usually due to a larger number of OSCE stations.

### **3.8 Major religious festivals**

The assessments team consults with the University's own faith group representatives and researches dates of forthcoming major religious festivals to try to avoid any examination clashing with these dates.

## **4. Information required from students**

#### **4.1 Written declaration**

Students are asked to supply a written declaration from an appropriate third person that the student wishes to observe religious festivals while at SGUL. This could be a letter written on the student's behalf and signed by the student's own Rabbi, Imam, Priest, Minister, etc.

If a student practises a religion which has no central authority they will be asked to write and sign their own written declaration.

The original of any written declaration needs to be supplied to the Examinations Manager. This information will be kept with a student's personal file in Registry.

The student will then be placed on the assessments team's additional arrangements list for exams. This means that throughout the student's university career, the assessment team will do their best to offer a reasonable adjustment if they are made aware -within the specified time (see point 4.2) of any potential date clash.

#### **4.2 Notice regarding the observance of religious festivals**

SGUL recognises that it may not be possible for the assessments team to be aware of the date of every religious festival.

Given the time it takes the institution to co ordinate the exam schedule, all students are asked to inform the assessments team in advance of the dates of any religious festivals they would like to observe, if it means they will be unable to attend exams, or indeed a class.

All first year undergraduate students begin in the September of each year. Registry sends all new students provisional term dates in January and confirmed dates in June. This enables students to check these dates against their own religious calendar.

All other students receive provisional term dates before the start of term – these can be found on the Registry homepage on the portal in the autumn term each year.

For postgraduate taught courses, the schedule for the whole course is given out in advance therefore part-time students, for example, would get 2 years notice of a date for an oral exam and so would have plenty of time to request a special arrangement

Students who wish to notify Registry of their wish to observe a religious festival -if the festival falls within term dates - must adhere to the following procedure . Notification must:

- Be given at least 6 weeks in advance of the religious festival
- Be given in written or electronic form
- Be addressed to the Examinations Manager in Registry
- Include the specific times of the day when the student will need to observe the religious festival

Students need to be aware that given the constraints mentioned above all applications submitted late i.e. after 6 weeks, will not normally be considered.

## **5. Examples of reasonable adjustments which may be offered**

However, SGUL is committed to equality and diversity and wishes to support all its students by making reasonable adjustments wherever possible.

Such reasonable adjustments may include:

- the choice of a morning or afternoon examination slot (e.g. to enable Muslim students to attend prayers at a Mosque, or Jewish students to reach home before sundown, etc)
- an opportunity to begin an examination earlier, but on the same day as their peers (the student would not be able to leave the examination room until all the other students taking the exam had arrived)
- the opportunity to take an exam at a later date
- subject to constraints and for essay-based examinations only- the possibility of a different essay question to be formulated specifically for an individual student, so that if they take an examination on a different day from their peers, the security of the exam paper is preserved.
- subject to constraints and the availability of the examiners- for an oral exam, SGUL may consider re-scheduling the meeting of the exam board, or else inviting the student to take the oral exam the following year. This could mean that the student would have to wait to be awarded their result. Occasionally we have offered oral exams by video link.
- arrangements for a student to sit papers abroad if that student needed to be in their home country for a particular religious festival. (However please be aware that research students only do one thesis and an oral exam at the end of up to 8 years. This is timed individually to suit them. However, these exams must take place in London, with no video links).

However it is important to note that the solutions outlined above may not be appropriate in all cases. Solutions also depend upon which course or type of exam the student is asked to undertake.

## **6. When reasonable adjustments may not be offered**

It is very important that students are aware that it may not be possible to make reasonable adjustments for some examinations . For instance:

### **6.1 OSPEs**

OSPE may not be run on a Monday due to the preparation needed for the specimens. As wet specimens are prepared the working day before, wet specimens prepared on Friday for a Monday exam would dry out.

## **6.2 OSCEs**

OSCEs are very complex to organise. It is very unlikely that SGUL would be able to make any special arrangements to accommodate a particular student. The assessment team may be able to offer a morning or afternoon slot.

This policy has been Equality Impact Assessed and we have objectively justified why we cannot make other adjustments to OSPEs and OSCEs.

Sophie Bowen  
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(reviewed Sept 2015)

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