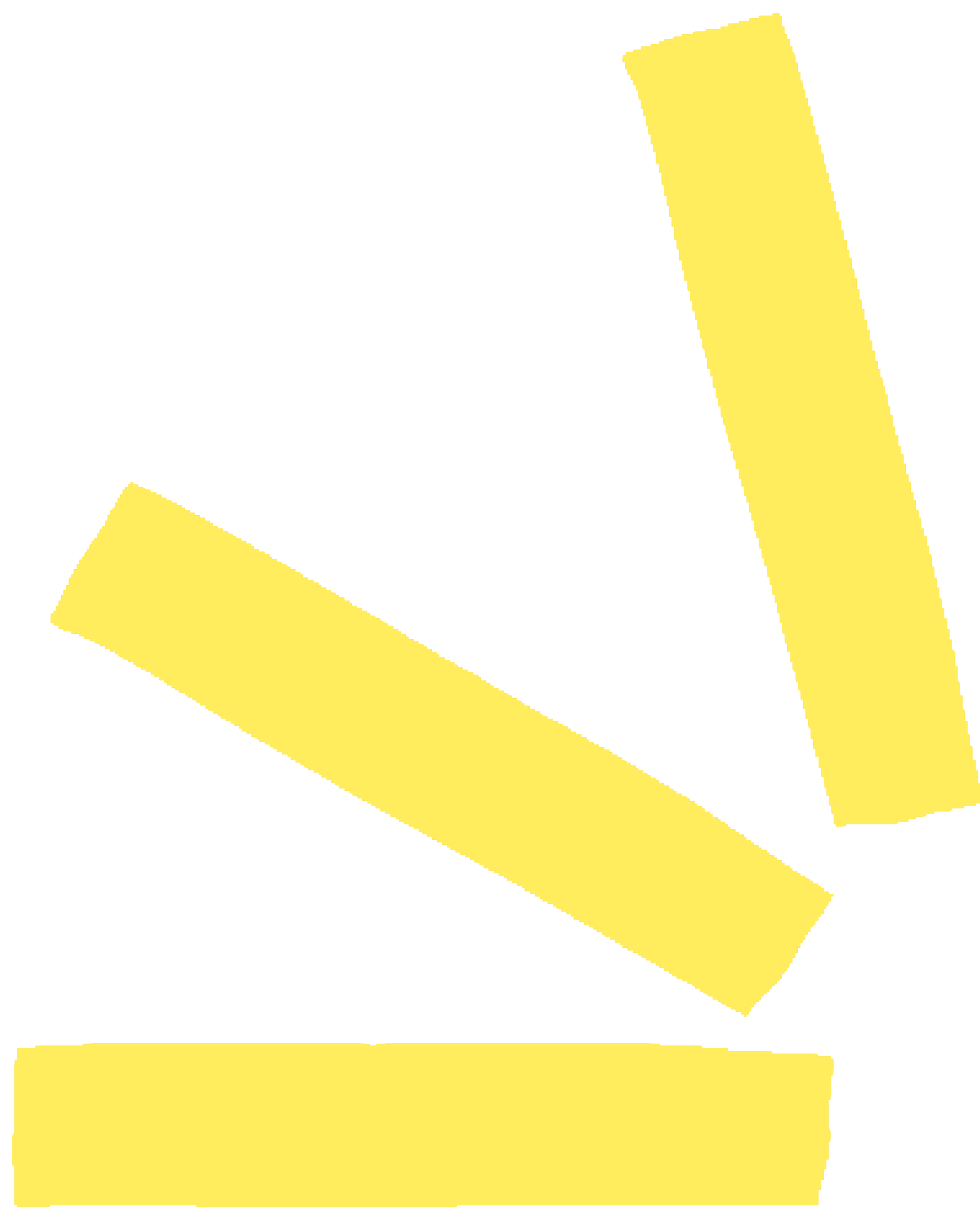


Tackling Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred

Practical guidance for UK universities



Introduction

Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred are wrong, and should not be tolerated at universities, or anywhere in society.

Islamophobia refers to hostility, mistrust or hatred towards Islam and Muslim people, because of their Muslim identity (or perceived Muslim identity). In our briefing, we also use the term ‘anti-Muslim hatred’ to highlight the emphasis Islamophobia has on individual Muslims.

Evidence suggests that Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred are widespread, and perhaps even normalised, in the UK.¹ But by addressing this, universities have an opportunity to not only make a difference to the hundreds of thousands of Muslim students and staff in the sector, but also to positively shape the minds and attitudes of the next generation.

We strongly urge universities to do all they can to address Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred.

About this briefing

The purpose of our briefing is to raise awareness of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in higher education, and suggest practical actions that universities can take in response.

We build on the recommendations of our [Changing the culture framework](#), including our [guidance on tackling racial harassment in higher education](#). Universities may also wish to note our [guidance on tackling antisemitism in higher education](#).

Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred are a problem throughout society, and sadly higher education is no exception. There are many examples of universities working with students and staff to tackle the issue.

However, our research has found that in the higher education sector, efforts to tackle incidents of hate, including on the grounds of religion and belief, are not as developed as efforts to tackle sexual misconduct and gender-based violence.²

This issue was put forward by a number of stakeholders consulted in the development of our briefing. Some felt that Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred are relatively under-addressed, especially when compared to other equality concerns.

Universities now have an opportunity to strengthen their understanding of Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred, and double down on efforts to address it.

Our briefing supports this by:

- defining Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in the UK
- highlighting the issues faced by Muslim students and where universities can act
- offering case studies to illustrate the approaches taken by universities
- providing links to further information, training and resources



Wider context

Efforts by universities to tackle Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred must be made across institutions, and cannot fall to one individual or team. However, we recognise that in many universities, efforts to tackle Islamophobia will fall within a broader set of activities to address harassment.

Universities in England, Scotland and Wales are public bodies, meaning they are subject to the Equality Act 2010, which provides protection from harassment on the grounds of protected characteristics, including religion and belief. The Act also obliges universities to foster good relations and promote understanding between those who have different characteristics, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

The Equality Act 2010 does not apply to Northern Ireland, although public authorities are subject to similar requirements under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This includes promoting good relations between those of different religious beliefs.

Wider protections against hate crime are also relevant to tackling anti-Muslim hatred. Hate crime refers to hostility towards a person based on a protected characteristic, including their religion. Hate crime on the basis of a person's religion is now an offence in all nations of the UK. In this briefing, we use the term 'hate incident' to refer to hostility towards someone based on their religion which does not constitute a criminal act. Universities in England also take into account the Office for Students (OfS)' statement of expectations on preventing and addressing harassment.

Universities must balance their legal duties to ensure good relations and safeguard students with the need to protect freedom of speech and academic freedom. Universities will be aware of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill, which will strengthen free speech requirements on universities. We're continuing to work with the government to ensure this Bill is proportionate, workable, and does not have unintended consequences. We have asked the government to produce guidance to help universities interpret the different requirements placed upon them by the Bill.

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill does not change or supersede any existing legislation, including the Equality Act 2010. Freedom of speech is never a justification for harassment.

Finally, while the recommendations in this briefing focus on Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred experienced by students, we expect many of the recommendations would apply equally to Muslim staff working in the higher education sector.

Understanding Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred

Islamophobia is not a recent phenomenon. Common Islamophobic tropes – for example, that western society is ‘under threat’ from Muslims – have existed for hundreds of years. However, recently Islamophobia has become a significant problem in the UK. Anti-Muslim hate crime is now the most commonly recorded form of religious hate in England and Wales.³

Experts have attributed the increase in Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in recent years to a heightened fear of Muslims in response to terror attacks connected to Islamist extremism, including 9/11 and 7/7.⁴ This has resulted in Islam or Muslim people sometimes being conflated with extremism or terrorism. For example, a number of far-right agitators have aimed to position Muslims as a dangerous or suspect community, arguing that they threaten British society and values.⁵

Although many people do not hold such extreme positions, some commentators consider that Islamophobia has become socially acceptable to many Britons. Baroness Warsi argued in 2011 that Islamophobia has ‘passed the dinner-table test’.⁶

In 2020–21, 2,703 incidents of anti-Muslim hate crime were recorded in England and Wales – taking the form of verbal and physical abuse, as well as incidents taking place online.⁷ As with all forms of hate crime, many incidents go unreported. Figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales for 2017/18 to 2019/20 suggested that incidents of religion-based hate crime were approximately six times higher than the number of reported incidents.⁸

Hate crime against Muslims often increases following ‘trigger events’, such as around the EU referendum and domestic or international events, which can embolden perpetrators to spread hate.⁹ For instance, in the week following the Christchurch terror attack in 2019, reports of anti-Muslim incidents in the UK rose by 692%.¹⁰

While Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred taking place online is not a new issue, research suggests it has become more prominent during the Covid-19 pandemic. Research has demonstrated how Islamophobic abuse and conspiracy theories linking Muslims to the spread of Covid-19 were commonly seen on social media during the lockdown period.¹¹

In addition to incidents that can be defined as hate crime, many Muslims regularly experience microaggressions – subtle, insidious and ‘everyday’ forms of prejudice. Many are also subject to stereotyped or negative assumptions because of their Muslim identity.

Individuals or groups that are wrongly perceived by some to be Muslim (such as Sikhs) may also be subject to Islamophobic harassment or hate incidents.¹² Harassment may also occur between different Muslim groups, eg between Sunni and Shia groups.

Intersectionality

People may experience Islamophobia differently on the grounds of their gender, race, sexuality, or other personal characteristics.

Many Muslims in the UK are from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic groups, with over half of British Muslims having either Pakistani or Bangladeshi ethnic heritage.¹³ Many Muslims are therefore navigating multiple minoritised identities, and may experience a ‘double penalty’ on the grounds of both their race and religion. While there is a clear intersection between religious and racial harassment, some feel that classifying Islamophobia purely as a form of racial harassment does not account for prejudice towards the Islamic faith itself.¹⁴

In addition, Islamophobia is often gendered. Women who wear visibly religious garments, such as the hijab or niqab, are especially likely to be targeted. Muslim women may therefore face a ‘triple penalty’ on the grounds of their religion, gender and race. One police force reported that three-quarters of all hate crimes against women in two years were anti-Muslim in nature.¹⁵

These are not the only personal characteristics that may intersect with Muslim identity, and universities should consider and be alert to how people with a range of protected characteristics may be affected by Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred.

Intersectionality

A way of considering discrimination that recognises the way different structures of inequality can combine to create specific forms of oppression, based on different parts of someone’s identity.

Defining Islamophobia

As there is a lack of consensus on a single definition of Islamophobia in the UK, our briefing identifies the most commonly described elements of Islamophobia, without giving preference to one particular definition.

Several groups have sought to define Islamophobia, with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims working definition being one of the more well-known. Some groups representing British Muslims do not feel the APPG definition is accurate, whereas others believe it can aid understanding of Islamophobia and provide a means for organisations to both formally recognise Islamophobia and begin to address the issue.¹⁶

We know that some universities have adopted the APPG definition, either in its original form or with modifications. [See the case study on page 18](#) for an example of how the University of Winchester did this. We recommend that universities considering whether to adopt this definition (or any others) should consult with and be guided by their Muslim students and staff.

APPG definition

‘Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness’

Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred in higher education

Student population

In the 2019/20 academic year, there were over 200,000 Muslim students at UK universities – 8.7% of the student population.¹⁷ This is greater than the proportion of Muslims in the UK overall, but not unexpected given that this group has a young demographic profile.¹⁸ Research has also indicated that Muslims are more likely than average to enter further and higher education.¹⁹

Although the majority of Muslim students are UK-domiciled, approximately 10% are international students,²⁰ a group likely to have specific experiences and needs. In particular, some international students may find it more difficult to access support should they experience Islamophobia. This may be due to cultural differences, the challenges of navigating official structures in a foreign country, and a relative lack of personal networks in the UK.

The scale of the problem

Muslim students have many positive, enjoyable experiences of higher education.²¹ However, research indicates that Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred is present at UK universities, and affects large numbers of Muslim students.

For example, a 2017/18 National Union of Students (NUS) survey of Muslim students in the UK found that one in three respondents had experienced some type of abuse or crime at their place of study, both online and in person, with the majority believing it was motivated by prejudice about their Muslim identity.²² A similar number reported being ‘fairly or very worried’ about experiencing verbal abuse, physical attacks, vandalism, or desecration of property.

Women who wore traditional religious garments were significantly more likely to be very worried about experiencing such abuse, reflecting the often-gendered nature of Islamophobia. A survey at one English university also found that students who had experienced a religious-based hate incident or crime were more likely to be Muslim and from a Black or minority ethnic background.²³

As well as outright hate incidents, many Muslim students are subject to harassment and microaggressions, including being treated with hostility, suspicion, or stereotypical and/or offensive assumptions (such as that Muslim women are passive and reserved).²⁴ For instance, 25% of Muslim students at one English university reported having been asked to defend the wearing of religious garments while on campus.²⁵

The NUS found that one in four Muslim students would not report an Islamophobic incident, either to their university or police.²⁶ This was due to a lack of trust in their institution to respond appropriately.

Other research highlights that many Muslim students (especially those who wear religious garments) feel highly ‘visible’. Some reported that, due to the common conflation of Islam with terrorism, they felt viewed by others as a threat.

They felt that actions that would be considered ‘normal’ for most students – such as being vocal about their political views – were regarded with suspicion.²⁷ Many have attributed these concerns to the effect of the Prevent duty within higher education. They argue it can negatively affect Muslim students’ experience and sense of belonging at university.

Muslim students are less likely to receive a 1st/2:1 degree than average,²⁸ experience higher dropout rates, and report lower satisfaction with their university experience.²⁹ This evidence suggests that elements of Muslim student experiences – including experiences of Islamophobia – may affect attainment and sense of belonging.

The framing of the Public Sector Equality Duty places a duty on universities to consider ways to improve the experience and participation of students and staff in relation to their religion or belief.



**How can
universities act?**

1. Welcoming Muslims on campus

What are the issues?

Barriers to practising religion

Muslim students may face institutional or structural barriers to practising their religion on campus, such as a lack of suitable prayer facilities, conflicts between prayer times and lectures, exams being scheduled during Ramadan, and an absence of halal food.³⁰ Such issues may be relatively straightforward for a university to resolve, but can have a profound impact on Muslim students' experience at university.

Events not being inclusive

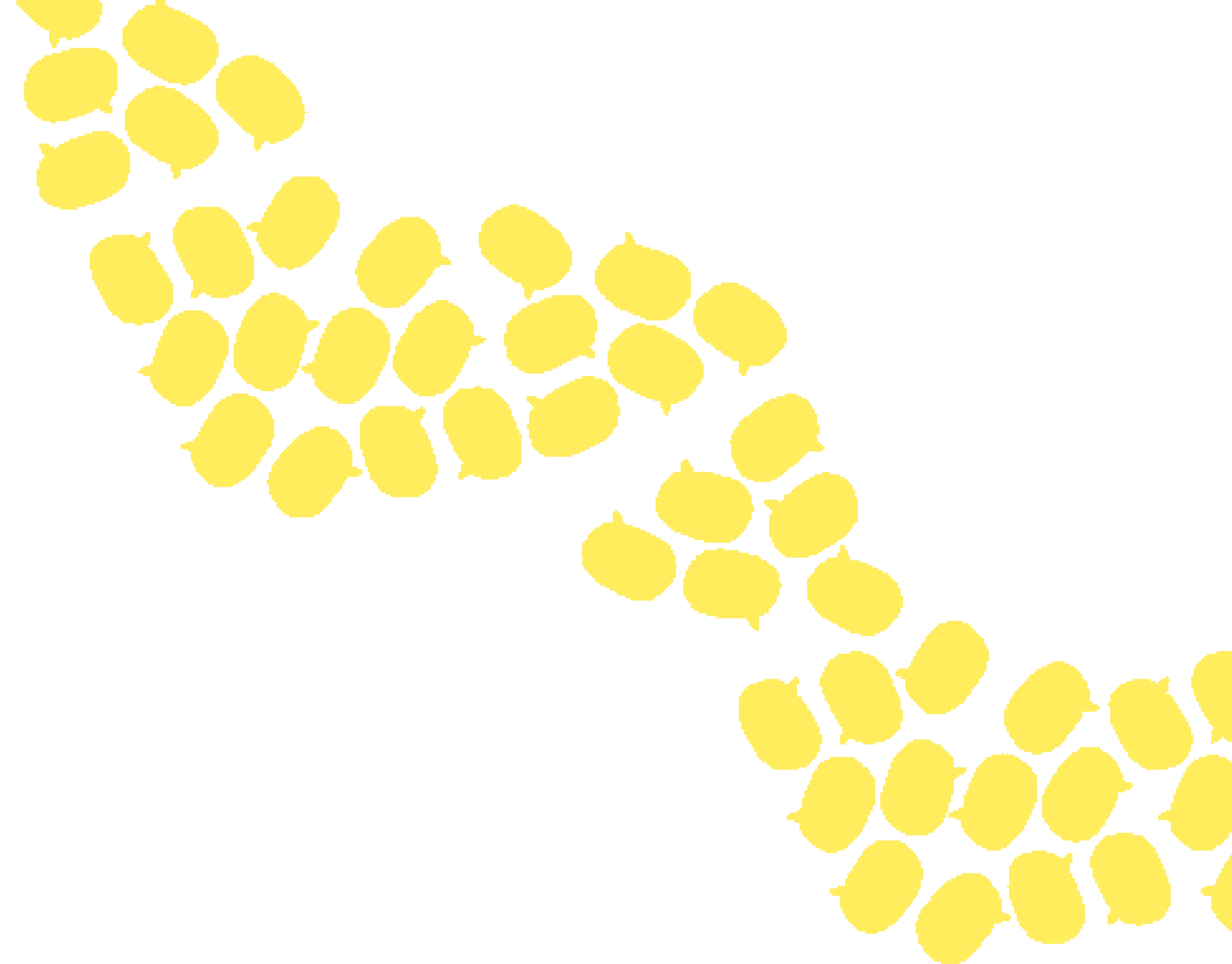
Some campus activities and student societies – especially those that revolve around drinking alcohol – may not be inclusive of many Muslim students.³¹ This can also extend to staff, who may feel excluded from work socials. This can impact on sense of belonging and social networks. For staff, this may have implications for career progression.³²

Issues in class

Islam is a common topic of teaching or discussion in lectures, seminars, and other academic settings. However, the way this is done can sometimes be difficult for Muslim students: in 2018, 44% reported feeling uncomfortable with how issues relating to Muslim people or terrorism are covered in class.³³ For example, students have reported comments from their lecturers describing Islam as 'medieval'.³⁴

Feeling watched

A common theme is that some Muslim students report feeling as though they are under surveillance, or viewed with suspicion by those around them – for instance, they may be called on to condemn terror attacks.³⁵ This can result in self-censorship,³⁶ reluctance to engage in democratic activities (such as seeking election as a sabbatical officer in their students' union),³⁷ and feeling 'othered'. This affects Muslim students' feelings of security and belonging on campus. Many commentators have attributed this to the implementation of the Prevent duty.



What can universities do?

Build relationships with groups

representing Muslim staff and students, including faith societies, to understand their experiences and needs, as well as any barriers or challenges. Different universities will face different challenges, so engagement is important for each university to understand the issues in their own context and to respond accordingly.

Consider how to foster a sense of belonging for Muslim students and staff (and other faith groups) by actively taking account of their religious needs. This includes making practical changes to support Muslim students in their academic and university social life.³⁸

Key accommodations include:

- Making appropriate prayer room and washroom facilities available, and keeping them regularly maintained.
- Providing halal food that is clearly marked, and that catering staff are confident in handling appropriately.
- Considering how dress codes (such as requirements for dress in laboratories) can be made compatible for people who wear religious garments, such as the hijab. For example, the University of Exeter has published guidelines to ensure Muslim students are able to wear religious garments while on clinical placement.
- Taking a sensitive approach to requests for academic accommodations where possible, eg offering students the opportunity to sit afternoon exams earlier in the day during Ramadan, or to attend Friday Jummah prayers (congregational prayers on Fridays).
- Ensuring that not all university open days fall during Ramadan.
- Supporting a variety of social events, including those not related to drinking alcohol, and ensuring non-alcoholic options are available.

Seek to support all Muslim faith societies, which can provide an important social network and 'safe space' for Muslims on campus.

Where relevant, consider how positive representations of Islam may be included in course content and curricula

eg the contribution of Muslim scholars to algebra. This may contribute to both Muslim students' sense of belonging, as well as providing non-Muslim students with positive representations of Muslims and Islam.³⁹

Encourage free and frank discussion of religion, and other sensitive issues in a spirit of mutual respect and balance. Such robust discussions are an important component of academic life and should be encouraged. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that some groups (including Muslims) come to such discussions from a minoritised position.⁴⁰

Where classroom discussion may focus on issues relating to Islam or Muslim people, universities should ensure that staff are appropriately trained in recognising and responding to Islamophobic comments that may arise. Lecturers and teaching staff should also be mindful to ensure that their own biases or prejudices do not lead their teaching, and prioritise opportunities for respectful, balanced debate.

2. Understanding, prevention and response

What are the issues?

As in wider society, many students at UK universities are poorly informed about Islam or Islamophobia: over half report having no or limited knowledge of Islam.⁴¹ In addition, while most students have a positive perception of Islam and Muslim people, a significant minority appear to hold more negative views – for example, a fifth agree with the view that Islam is incompatible with British values.⁴² While such views do not automatically result in committing harassment, Muslim students have reported that much of the Islamophobia they experience results from a lack of understanding of Islam, leading to stereotyping and discrimination.⁴³

This suggests that a greater understanding of Islam is likely to reduce Islamophobia. However, research also indicates that many staff and students are reluctant or uncomfortable with speaking openly about religion, especially Islam. This can reduce opportunities to counter stereotypes and negative views.⁴⁴

Many students are not confident in reporting incidents due to a lack of trust, and a majority are unaware of whether they can access a third-party reporting centre. These organisations allow individuals to report hate incidents anonymously, and can then follow up with relevant authorities on their behalf.⁴⁵

Universities should therefore focus on increasing understanding of Islam and Islamophobia as a means of prevention, increasing students' confidence to report Islamophobic incidents, and responding robustly when these incidents occur.

What can universities do?

Develop confidence in increasing student and staff understanding of different religions

, including Islam, and holding open discussions about this on campus. Some universities have existing partnerships with Islamic colleges, such as to provide degree accreditation. These colleges typically have deep expertise on Islam, and may provide a useful opportunity for facilitating learning and discussion. For example, [see the case study on page 17](#) of how University of Wales Trinity Saint David has incorporated discussion of Islam into its humanities degrees.

Consider how interaction between different groups can be maximised

, such as in university accommodation, student societies, and providing spaces for discussing teaching and academic content. Universities offer important opportunities for dialogue between students of different religious backgrounds, which increases understanding among those of different groups and can help to dismantle stereotypes.

Research indicates that informal personal encounters – such as interactions in halls of residence, or through collaboration on group coursework – can provide the most valuable space for such dialogue.⁴⁶

Encourage and facilitate inter-faith activities, which may also be an important source of building cohesion on campus, especially between different religious and faith groups.⁴⁷

Involve representatives of Muslim students and Muslim chaplains in equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives to ensure a holistic response to all forms of harassment, including anti-Muslim harassment. For example, [see the case study on page 16](#) from Coventry University.

Ensure that that policies relating to harassment, hate speech or hate incidents (including bystander intervention schemes) explicitly refer to religion or belief, including Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred. Likewise, universities should ensure that any EDI training, such as unconscious bias training, includes details of faith-based harassment, including Islamophobia and anti-Muslim hatred.

Consider offering training on understanding and tackling Islamophobia to groups of staff who may find it most beneficial, such as those responsible for harassment casework. The Federation of Student Islamic Societies (FOSIS) offers training for university staff and student union officers on understanding and tackling Islamophobia, including practical tips and case study activities.

Be sensitive to the impact ‘trigger events’ may have on Muslim students and staff.

When ‘trigger’ events such as terror attacks happen, universities should consider proactive communications to show solidarity, reiterate behavioural expectations, and signpost sources of support and reporting procedures.

Ensure victims of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim hatred have a choice over whether and how they pursue incidents – whether this is informally, or through official reporting or complaints channels.

Include separate options for racial harassment and religious or faith-based harassment where reporting mechanisms ask students to classify the type of harassment they have experienced. Universities should consider questions relating to religion or belief as part of the reporting system to aid understanding of the groups of students most likely to experience harassment.

Include signposting to specialist hate reporting services within communications about harassment, as some may feel more confident reporting to such services. Universities should consider receiving reports made by third parties where this is not already done.

Ensure that reporting mechanisms clearly signpost sources of support for those experiencing Islamophobia, including culturally competent support services where possible. Universities should consider how those responsible for receiving reports of religion-based hate incidents or crime can best respond and support students.

For instance, Coventry University appointed a dedicated case manager for religion-based hate incidents and crimes, which helped to improve the university’s response to such incidents and proved a popular reporting mechanism for students.⁴⁸

Review procedures for handling harassment complaints to ensure they are fit for purpose and reflect best practice, including complaints of anti-Muslim harassment. The Office for Students has recently invited all providers to review and update systems, policies and procedures in line with its [statement of expectations](#) for preventing and addressing harassment and sexual misconduct.

Further support and guidance, including links to complaints handling frameworks in the four UK nations, is available in our [guidance on tackling racial harassment](#), from the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator](#); the [Scottish Public Services Ombudsman](#), and the [Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman](#).

Reviews of policies and procedures should involve students and staff, including actively consulting groups representing Muslim students and staff. Universities may also wish to work in conjunction with local police and organisations tackling Islamophobia.

Communicate that anti-Muslim abuse that occurs online is as unacceptable as that which occurs in person. Universities should provide examples of how students may report unacceptable online behaviours, such as comments in group chats. This is particularly important given the recent shift to greater use of online environments in both teaching and learning and social settings at universities during the pandemic.

SEE OUR GUIDANCE ON TACKLING ONLINE HARASSMENT AND PROMOTING ONLINE WELFARE

3. Prevent

What are the issues?

Like many other public bodies, universities in England, Wales and Scotland are subject to the Prevent duty. This is a statutory duty under the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, requiring universities to ‘have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism’.

This extends to all forms of terrorism, and people of any ethnic and religious background may be referred to Prevent. However, many prominent organisations representing Muslims in the UK – including the Muslim Council of Britain and FOSIS, as well as academics – have expressed significant concern about Prevent. These concerns include that Prevent disproportionately affects Muslims, perpetuates Islamophobia and contributes to an atmosphere that views Muslims as objects of suspicion, creating a chilling effect on free speech.

Studies have indicated that, as a whole, students typically have low awareness of Prevent.⁴⁹ However, Muslim students – especially those who are more politically active – are more aware of Prevent than average.⁵⁰

A 2018 NUS survey found that one-third of Muslim students felt they had been negatively affected by Prevent.⁵¹ Examples included events organised by Muslim students being cancelled or significantly changed, or students disengaging from political debate due to concerns of being referred to Prevent. Some students also reported reluctance to participate in student democracy due to a fear of being referred.

A 2020 study also found many examples of Muslim students ‘self-censoring’ due to concerns over being referred to Prevent, including being reluctant to express views in class, and feeling discouraged from pursuing academic studies related to Islam, especially when linked to fundamentalism or terrorism.⁵² Some students reported feeling that outward displays of religious practice (such as reading religious texts) were likely to place them under suspicion. Islamic societies have also reported becoming more risk-averse in activities, including potentially in relation to organising external speaker events.⁵³

A study at one English university found that most Muslim students did not feel as though their interactions with university staff or peers were shaped by Prevent.

However, a number reported being careful about how they expressed themselves, including ‘self-policing’. For example, this may include not speaking up in class about issues relating to Islam for fear of being viewed as an extremist. Although not directly attributed to Prevent, it was clear that some Muslim students felt viewed with suspicion by others within the university – for instance, being called on to condemn terror attacks.⁵⁴

Additionally, where the Prevent duty requires non-specialists to make judgements about individuals, there is the possibility that these are informed by preconceptions, assumptions or stereotypes.⁵⁵

Preventing people from being drawn into terrorism is of critical importance, and we recognise that Prevent is a statutory duty which universities must continue to comply with.

In doing so, we encourage universities to be mindful of how they engage with and implement Prevent. Research has indicated that the nature of the impact of Prevent varies considerably between institutions according to how it has been implemented.⁵⁶

What can universities do?

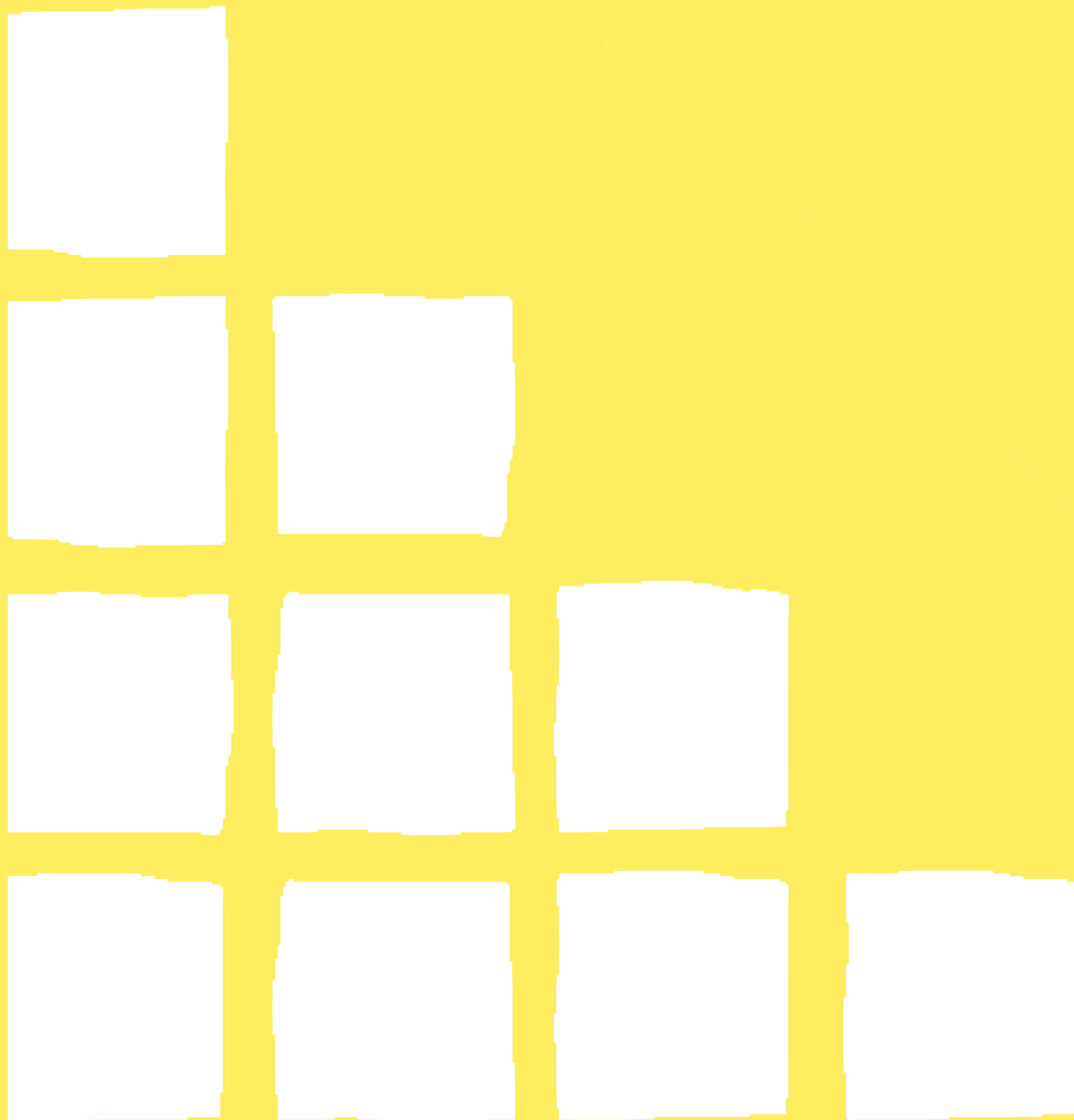
Ensure all students are informed about the existence of Prevent, its purpose, and how it is implemented.

Recognise there are concerns about the impact of Prevent on Muslim students, and ensure there are regular opportunities for staff and students to engage with the university and raise any issues or anxieties.

Avoid training materials that present stereotypes of Islam and Muslims (or any other group).

Ensure those responsible for implementing Prevent have had training on Islamophobia, and have a nuanced understanding of radicalisation and how it may present.

Consider how to ensure that free speech and academic freedom is maintained in meeting the Prevent duty – for instance, how external speaker policies and requirements can best maximise freedom of speech.



Case studies

Coventry University

Tackling religion and belief-related hate incidents and the role of the Muslim chaplain

In 2018–19, Coventry University – supported by the Office for Students’ Catalyst funding – undertook a project to tackle religion and belief-related hate incidents on campus. Although the project was not specifically aimed at anti-Muslim hate incidents, Coventry does have a large Muslim student population (at least 11.8%). In addition, while the majority of students reported that their life was not significantly affected by fear of religion-related hate incidents, Muslim students were more likely to express this fear.

The university put in place several initiatives, including:

- employing a part-time case manager with expertise in religion and belief
- developing a case management and reporting system
- running a communications campaign to raise awareness of this system
- sharing learning throughout the sector

The [full findings](#) highlighted positive outcomes, including increasing students’ confidence to report hate incidents and their understanding of support mechanisms available.

Since this project’s conclusion, Coventry have continued to develop their response to religion-related hate incidents.

For example, having recognised the importance of expertise in religion and belief for those receiving reports of harassment and hate incidents, case managers have continued to maintain strong connections with university chaplains and other local faith groups. The project has also led to further research, including Coventry’s collaboration in the project ‘Building Positive Relationships among University Students across Religion and Worldview Diversity’ ([‘Ideals UK’](#)), which seeks to build interfaith relations and prevent religion and belief-related hate incidents at university.

Partnership working throughout the university was crucial to the success of Coventry’s work, including the involvement of the university’s Muslim chaplain. The chaplain was able to advise on project initiatives, as well as using their trusted position to promote surveys and reporting systems to students visiting the university spirituality and faith centre, and at gatherings such as Friday prayers.

The Muslim chaplain, employed by the university for three days a week, has an important role at Coventry.

This includes offering pastoral support to all students and staff, leading religious services, supporting Islamic and cultural student societies, and working collaboratively across university departments such as health and wellbeing, the students’ union and International Office.

The chaplain also provides advice and guidance to the university on issues affecting Muslim students and staff, such as during Ramadan or relating to Friday prayers. If Islamophobia or anti-Muslim incidents occur, they can support the victim and signpost them to reporting structures. They also work with the university’s other chaplains to organise inter-faith activities and provide an active, visible and welcoming presence on campus.

The university chaplaincy was an integral part of the ‘spirituality and faith’ section of Coventry’s ‘Connections Matter’ online platform, created to maintain engagement, promote wellbeing and provide support to students and staff during the Covid-19 lockdown. This platform was recently shortlisted for an award by the Institute of Internal Communication.

This highlights the overall approach of the chaplaincy and the wider university: that religious faith is deeply important in the lives of many of its students and members of staff, and it is important that universities recognise and reflect this in practical terms.

University of Wales Trinity Saint David

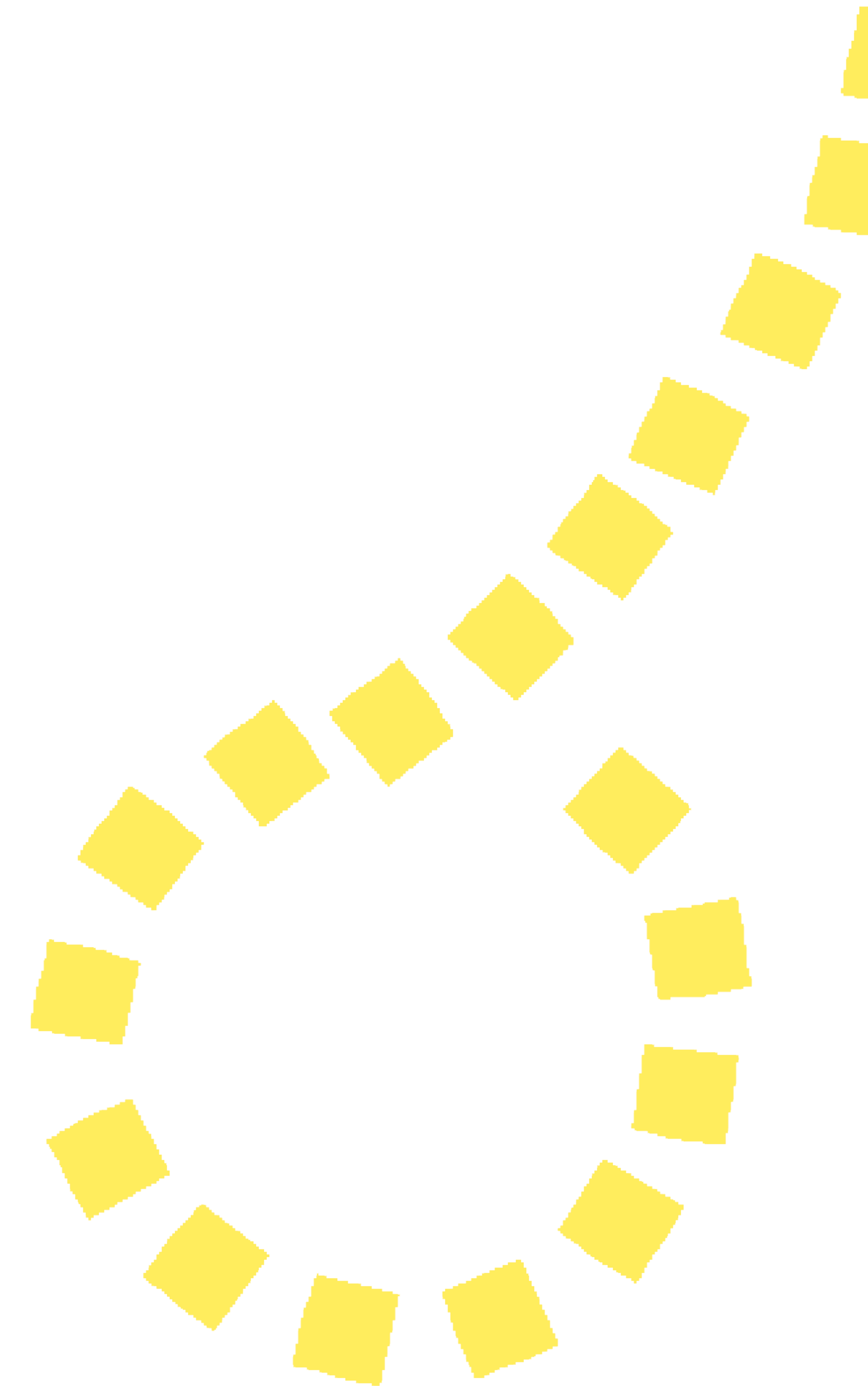
Work of the Islamic Studies team

The Islamic Studies team at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD) offers a range of degree programmes and modules, including coverage of topics related to Islamophobia. While some programmes are aimed at students with a specialised interest (such as MA Islamic Studies or MA Interfaith Studies), some modules are available to a wider cohort of students, with a diverse range of backgrounds and existing knowledge of Islam.

For example, second- and third-year undergraduate students on humanities courses may study an elective module on 'Islam in the west'. This includes discussion of definitions of Islamophobia, historical prejudice against Muslims, media representation of Islam today – including use of contemporary online materials, such as YouTube and TikTok – and current approaches to Islamophobia. Although the course is not designed with the explicit intention of preventing Islamophobia, it aims to equip students to understand and discuss related issues critically. Lecturers encourage students to use reputable sources and present balanced, evidence-based arguments, challenging assertions that are offensive or not based in fact.

Many UWTSD students work in public-facing roles after they graduate, such as teaching or social work. The understanding and skills gained in such modules help students to better understand people they may work with, in a way that is not based on stereotypes or uninformed assumptions.

UWTSD also has several links with Muslim communities and organisations, including the Muslim Council of Wales. These connections between academic and faith groups help to increase understanding contemporary issues affecting Muslims in the UK, and leads to positive activities, such as an annual Interfaith Conference.



University of Winchester

Adopting the APPG definition of Islamophobia

In autumn 2020, the University of Winchester was developing guidance on racial harassment for use alongside their existing disciplinary policies. The guidance was designed to give those using the disciplinary policies a deeper understanding of racial harassment, how it may manifest, and how to respond to incidents appropriately.

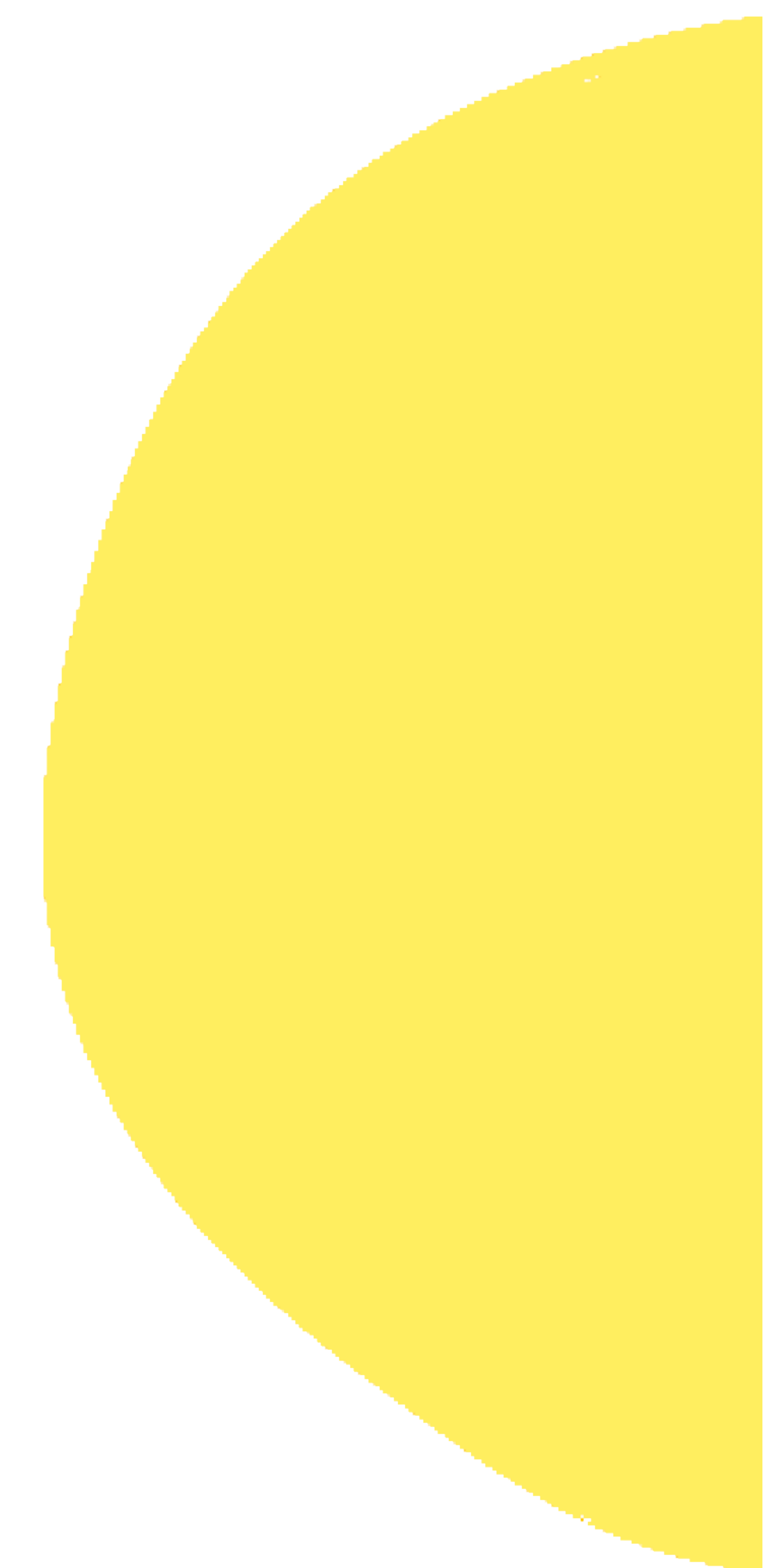
As part of this work, the university decided to include guidance on harassment experienced by religious groups. Although Islam is not an ethnicity, the university recognises that Muslim students can experience significant levels of harassment, including on the grounds of both race and religion. The university was already adopting the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, and wanted to give attention to issues experienced by other faith groups at the same time.

The university adopted the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims definition of Islamophobia, refined to refer to 'anti-Muslimness' rather than Islamophobia. This terminology reflects the thinking around freedom of expression issues of the APPG definition as expressed by groups such as Civitas. This terminology recognises that Islamophobia is experienced by individuals on grounds of their Muslimness, and this has an impact on them personally.

They also added two clarification points to the definition: to highlight that Muslims are not assumed to be a single race, and to clarify that the definition does not inherently preclude criticism of Islam or individual Muslims without additional evidence of anti-Muslimness. Similar caveats were also added to the IHRA definition.

The university consulted with Muslim staff and students through its BAME networks and the Race Equality Action Group, before securing endorsement for the definition from the executive leadership team and Board.

The university believe it is important to have an accepted, defined standard to judge Islamophobic and anti-Muslim incidents against. They also want to signal their intent to treat harassment affecting all students with equal importance. However, they acknowledge ongoing national and local debate about the definition, which they do not see as being 'set in stone'. The University of Winchester will continue to consult with stakeholders in their community about whether the definition remains most appropriate.



Resources

[Islamophobia training](#), delivered by FOSIS

[Digital training on responding to hate and extremism](#), including in higher education, delivered by the Centre for Hate Studies (University of Leicester)

[Support for Muslim students | Student Space](#) helpline service providing faith-sensitive support to Muslim students

[Religion and belief: supporting inclusion of staff and students in higher education and colleges](#) Advance HE (2018)

[Evaluation of Safeguarding Students Catalyst Fund Projects: Round three – interim report](#) Advance HE (2019)

[Tackling religion or belief-related harassment and hate incidents: a guide for higher education providers](#) Coventry University (2020)

[Freedom of expression: a guide for higher education providers and students' unions in England and Wales](#) Equality and Human Rights Commission (2019) /

[Freedom of expression: a guide for higher education providers and students' unions in Scotland](#) Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland (2019)

[Building belonging: Developing religiously inclusive cultures for Muslim students in higher education](#) Maisha Islam/Advance HE (2021)

[Muslims in the Workplace: A Good Practice Guide for Employers and Employees](#) Muslim Council of Britain (2019)

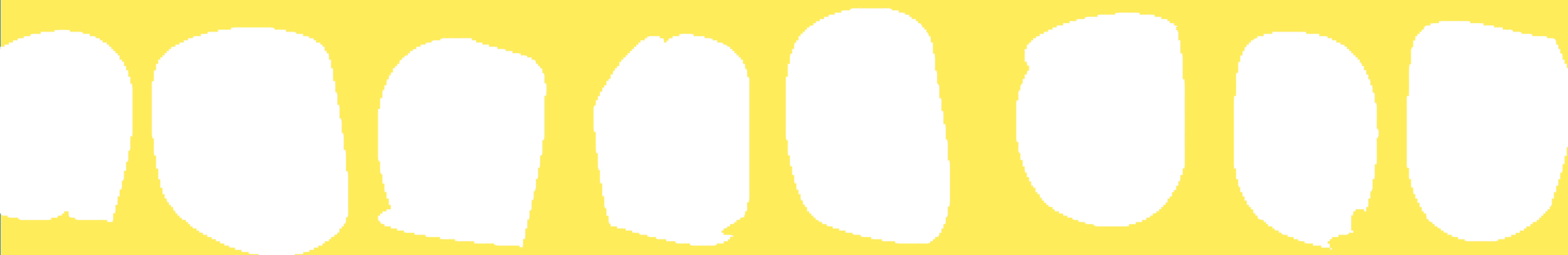
[Statement of expectations for preventing and addressing harassment and sexual misconduct affecting students in higher education](#) Office for Students (2021)

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We are extremely grateful to all those who have freely given their support to this work.



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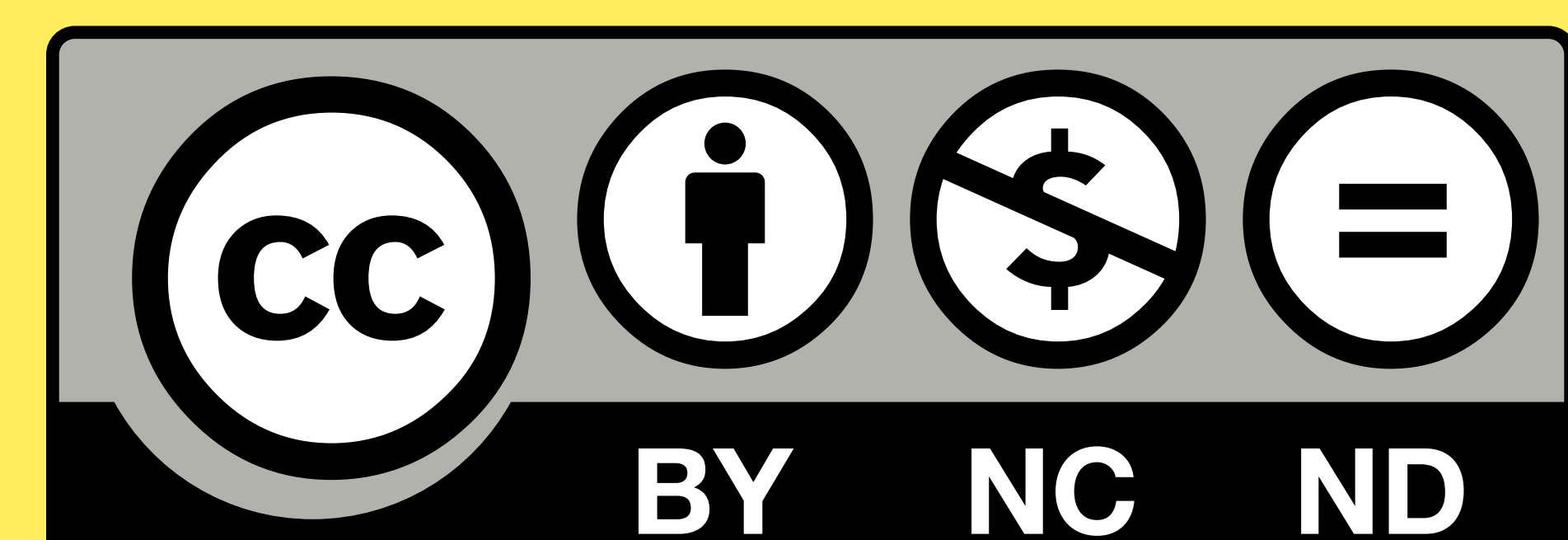
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December 2021
ISBN: 978-1-84036-478-1

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