



Creating an inclusive approach to teaching and learning during Ramadan

A brief evidence-based guide for educators in the UK

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Foreword

To work toward a just world [...] means, as a start, opening up heart and mind to the perspectives of others. We must be able to hear each other and to respect and learn from what we hear^{1(p169)}.

The higher education sector is not free from injustices. In the UK, Muslim students tend to have a poorer experience on campus than non-religious students; they face harassment, racism, and exclusion². Muslim students also have poorer degree outcomes than non-religious students, with only 61% being awarded a first class/upper second class degree classification compared with 77% of students who declare no religion³. However, Muslim students, like any student group, are not homogenous, and their requirements are not going to be uniform.

Within this context, this project was inspired by my Muslim students who were fasting during Ramadan. They were brave enough to be open with me about the way it was affecting them during class. I want to thank them; they prompted me to address my own lack of awareness and knowledge by undertaking the research behind this Guide.

This Guide is produced with an understanding that true inclusion of students with religious-based needs means properly embedding changes into institutional structures. This requires culture transformation, rather than ad-hoc practical adjustments. Nonetheless, this Guide provides suggestions for what individual educators can do, relatively easily and quickly, based on wisdom gathered from surveying experienced educators, and validated by our panel of Muslims and other experts. The key finding to emerge was the importance of listening to the perspectives of Muslim students, not making assumptions, and learning from what they say.

Finally, as the project lead, I acknowledge my positionality. A significant focus of my work involves understanding and supporting student learning from a psychological perspective as a White, British, non-religious woman. Therefore, I recruited a diverse interdisciplinary team to bring multiple perspectives to this project. I am motivated by the need to empower every student to be able to bring their whole selves into the classroom, and to experience respect when they express any aspect of their unique intersecting identities.

I hope that this Guide will help others who, like me, are at the heart of learning and teaching by interacting with students on a day-to-day basis.

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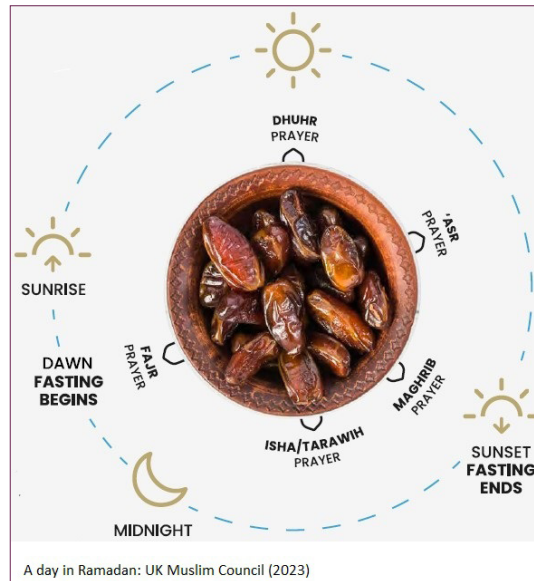
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What is Ramadan?

Fasting as a religious practice is a component of most major world religions. It has particular importance in Islam, in which Muslims abstain from food and drink during daylight hours during the month of Ramadan. Ramadan celebrates the revelation of the Qur'an to the Prophet Muhammad^{4(2:185)}. One of the five pillars of Islam is fasting during this holy month. In the UK, a Ramadan fast can last anywhere between 7 – 16 hours per day, depending on time of year. Due to the sacred nature of Ramadan, it is eagerly awaited and observed with joy and excitement.

Healthy Muslim adults will rise before dawn for breakfast (Suhur), fast during daylight hours, and break their fast at sunset (Iftar), often by first eating dates. This practice of fasting aims to inspire mindfulness of God, remind them of their duty to help those in need, and renew their gratitude for what God has provided. Ramadan culminates in Eid, which comprises up to three days of much-anticipated celebration.



Potential Impact of Ramadan on Learning

Throughout Ramadan, Muslim students' priorities may shift towards personal worship and devotion, as well as family and community. They are more likely to require time to pray during the day, and to be absent to celebrate Eid. You can hear a student from Oxford Brookes University discussing their experience of Ramadan in this [video](#)⁵.

The impact of Ramadan on learning may fluctuate, both during a given day and through the fasting period as a whole. Learning may be particularly affected during the last 10 days, which are considered the holiest.

Evidence regarding the impact of fasting during Ramadan on learning is mixed. Studies have found both positive and negative impacts on cognitive function, such as memory, and these can depend on whether students are in predominantly Muslim countries or not⁽⁶⁻¹¹⁾.

Ramadan not only alters students' eating patterns, but it also affects sleep routines due to taking part in congregational night prayers (Tarawih) and waking early for the pre-dawn meal (Suhoor).

Each year Ramadan falls approximately 10 days earlier than the previous year. In the UK in 2025, Ramadan will be between 1-30 March, depending on the sighting of the moon

The negative impact of lack of sleep on learning is well evidenced⁽¹²⁻¹⁵⁾, and this aspect of Ramadan could potentially have a greater impact on learning than fasting itself.

Lack of Guidance for Educators

Existing guidance on UK institutional web pages regarding Ramadan tends to be aimed at Muslim students rather than teaching staff. The guidance also often places responsibility on students themselves to seek support or adjustments they may need, which creates an additional burden. This positioning problematises individual students rather than institutional practices and policies. It could be considered indirect discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 if Muslim students are being disadvantaged compared to non-Muslim students.

Staff Survey

With these issues in mind, we conducted a short survey (see Appendix) of almost 300 educators, of which 80% were from UK HEIs, to find out what, if any, changes to their teaching practice they had made to support students who were fasting during Ramadan. We also explored the extent to which they were aware of Ramadan, and their beliefs about the need to make changes.

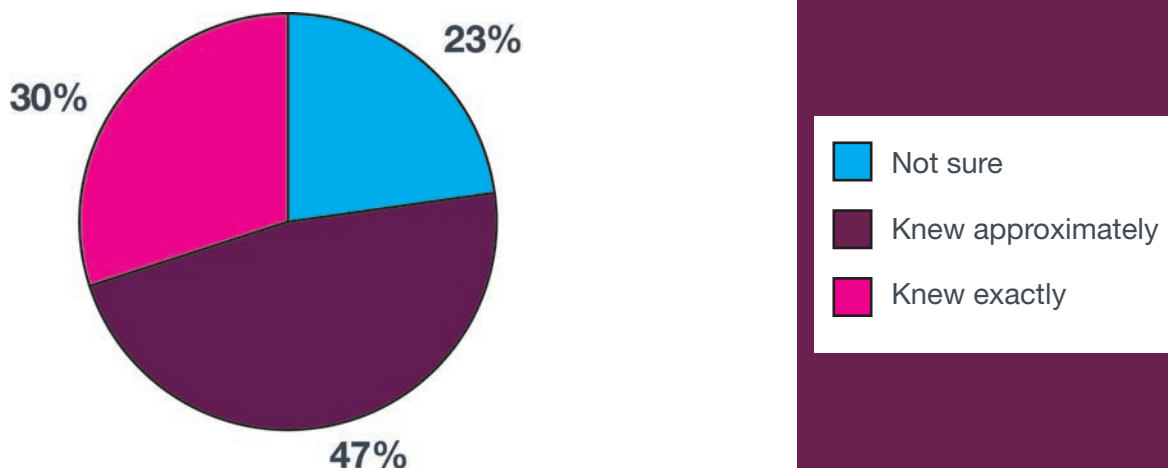
Participants were mostly female (66%), mostly lecturers/senior lecturers (59%), and predominantly taught in either the Social Sciences (43%) or Health and Social Care (20%). Almost half (46%) said they had no religion, 30% were Christian, and 10% were Muslim. Of note, 15% of participants taught classes or worked in roles where the majority of their students were Muslim.

Findings

Staff Awareness of Muslim Students

Approximately one quarter (23%) of respondents were not sure or did not know when Ramadan was in 2024, whereas 47% knew approximately when it was, and 30% knew exactly when it was.

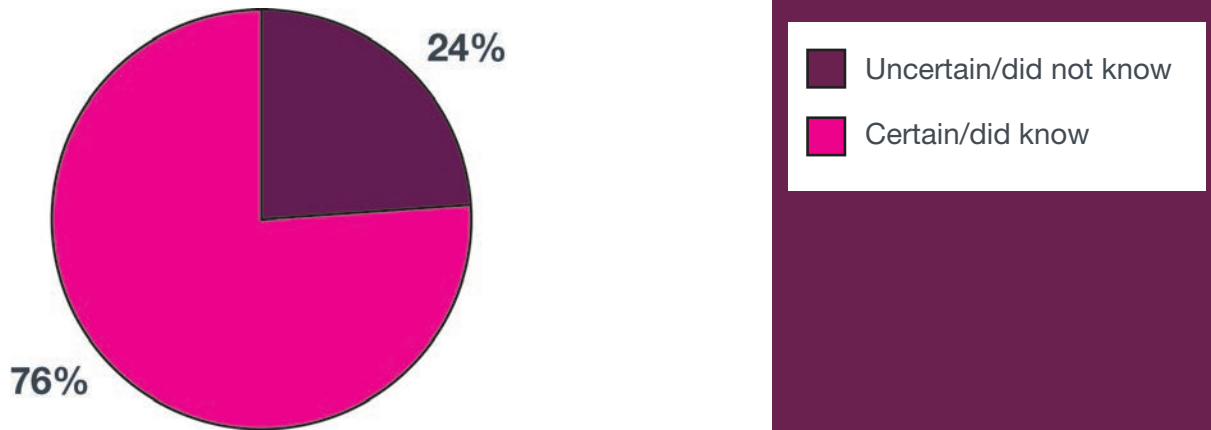
Figure 1: Were you aware of when Ramadan was taking place in 2024?



Approximately 321,000 students in UK higher education identify as Muslim (11%), which is the largest religious group after Christian (27%)³

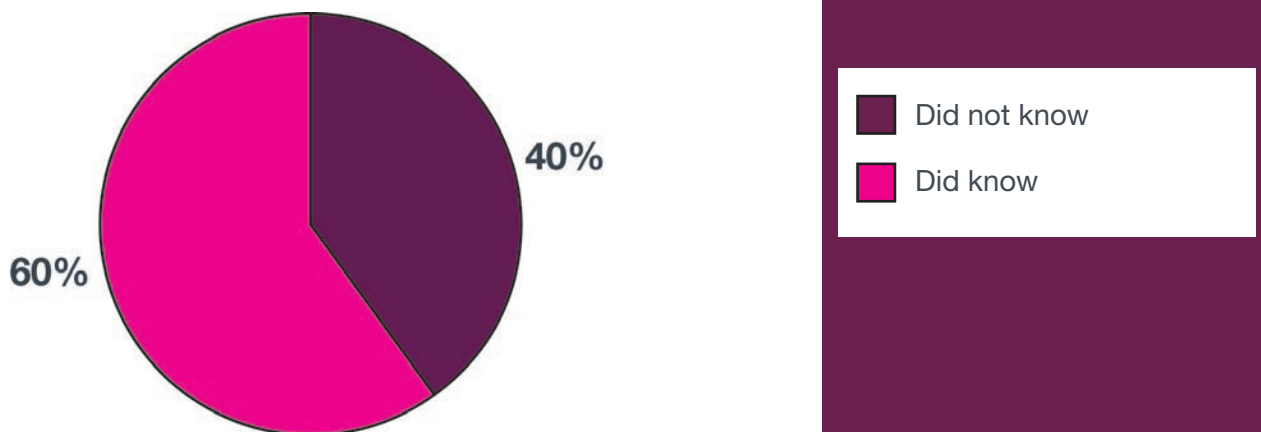
Approximately one quarter (24%) of respondents were uncertain or did not know if they had Muslim students in their classes, while 76% reported that they were certain that some of their students were Muslim.

Figure 2: Do you have any Muslim Students?



40% of respondents were not sure or did not know whether any of their students were fasting during Ramadan, whereas 60% were aware of them fasting.

Figure 3: Were you aware whether any of your Muslim Students were fasting during Ramadan 2024?



Despite some lack of awareness, 56% of respondents believed that there is a need for change, with half of this group explaining how they had already made changes to support students during Ramadan.

Myth Busting

Before we present guidance provided by our survey respondents to support students during Ramadan, including those on work placements, it is important to address some common myths that emerged from some open-text survey responses. We address these myths here by drawing on the expertise of our Muslim authors as well as our panel of Muslim educators and students, and religious leaders.

Myth 1: Avoid eating/drinking in front of fasting students

- This is not necessary: those who may be fasting respect the need for others to eat and drink and do not expect others to abstain. However, it would be considerate to avoid organising social events that centre around eating and drinking during Ramadan.
- It is a personal choice if a non-Muslim wants to avoid eating and drinking in front of Muslims during fasting hours. If you feel uncomfortable eating or drinking in front of a Muslim student, then it is acceptable to ask them whether they mind.
- You could have a conversation with your Muslim students about eating and drinking during class and find out about their beliefs and preferences.

Myth 2: Students will know what support is available to them, and request adjustments for deadlines if required

- Students may not know what support is available to them. More specifically, students may not be aware that they can request reasonable adjustments on the grounds of religious observance, for example, to coursework deadlines, assessments, etc. Students also may not feel very comfortable requesting such adjustments.
- You could look for your institutional policies relating to supporting religious observance, and signpost students to these in class and on the virtual learning platform.
- You could make it clear to students when discussing the assessment requirements that it is possible for them to request reasonable adjustments on the grounds of religious observance.

How to Change Teaching and Learning Practice

We recognise that there is not a 'one-size-fits all' approach, and that what is practical to change will vary vastly between different cohorts, disciplines, and geographical contexts. Also, what might work best for your own students may not be covered in this Guide. The most important finding was the value of initiating a dialogue with students, and creating a space which enabled them to feel included through sharing their experiences or difficulties.



The overall engagement and 'presence' of otherwise highly engaged students dips during Ramadan, and this is particularly evident at the latter parts of the day for sessions that may be timetabled into the afternoon

Survey respondent

The following list represents the most common and practical changes that were described by our survey respondents, and we offer these here as guidance for other educators. Finally, we also include guidance specifically for supporting students on work placements. The guidance has been reviewed and revised by our panel of Muslim staff and students to ensure validity.

1) Acknowledge Ramadan

- Send a message to all students to acknowledge Ramadan and the potential impact on those observing it. We have created an example of wording (See box 1) that could be used to send to all students; it is aimed at contexts in which Muslim students represent a small proportion of the cohort. This could be sent at the start of the semester in which Ramadan falls, and could be delivered in person and/or via a virtual learning platform. The message could be delivered by your programme leader(s) and/or individual educators.
- Similarly, acknowledge Ramadan among your colleagues, perhaps in a staff meeting. You could either do this yourself if you feel comfortable, or talk to your course leader(s) about them delivering an acknowledgement. The issues raised in this Guide could be used as a basis for further discussion about how to support students during this time.

It's not good to be too intrusive or assume things. If I'm aware that they take part in Ramadan I will provide extra opportunities for other hours for discussion etc., and provide additional time for work

Survey respondent

Box 1: Acknowledging Ramadan Email Template

Subject: Observing Ramadan

Ramadan is taking place this year between approximately [1-31 March 2025]. It is a time when Muslim students may be abstaining from food and drink during daylight hours. They may also have an altered sleep pattern, and may be taking more time to pray. If you are a Muslim student, it is possible that observing Ramadan may impact some aspects of your studies. We would like to support you so that you can continue studying during this time.

For example, we understand that:

- You may need to leave part of a teaching session to pray
- You may find it harder to concentrate in the afternoons
- You may prefer to study some of the course material independently rather than within taught sessions
- You may need to leave early from a teaching session to break your fast
- You may need to request alternative arrangements for assessment deadlines, particularly if these have been scheduled during Eid.

If you are observing Ramadan, and you have any concerns about how it may impact your studies or want to know what support may be available to you, then please get in touch with [_____].



2) Avoid Assumptions and Ask

- There are individual differences in what students prefer when fasting. This may depend on their context and other commitments. It may also vary from year to year, depending on when Ramadan falls and the timings of sunrise and sunset.
- Some students may be fasting, but it may not be obvious. Some students who usually observe Ramadan may be unable to fast on health grounds.
- Asking your students what they would find helpful allows for individual differences, and may be easier than trying to incorporate specific guidance.

3) Adjust Assessment Timings

- Where possible, consider dates of important assessment events or deadlines to avoid Ramadan and Eid.
- If an assessment takes place during Ramadan, try to enable fasting students to choose the time of day when they undertake it. This will help them to perform to the best of their ability.
- Bring assessment timing issues to the attention of your programme leader(s) and/or colleagues, so that deadlines can be coordinated within the programme to support Muslim students. Where it may not be practical to alter dates, ensure that Muslim students are informed of their ability to request alternate arrangements owing to religious observance.

4) Offer Asynchronous Learning

- Changes in Muslim students' sleeping, eating, and praying routines will impact their energy levels and the times that they are available to study. To accommodate this, some students may prefer to spend less time on campus and engage in more independent study.
- You could make study materials available for asynchronous learning. This will enable Muslim students to study at a time that fits in with their routine, and ensure that they will not miss out on important material.
- Be mindful of providing asynchronous learning when this might conflict with visa requirements for international students. Consider offering alternative contact time to mitigate this problem, for example, by promoting office hours (both for home and Tier 4 visa students), and be flexible in the times that you are available.

5) Raise Awareness and Celebrate

- Raise awareness that Ramadan is taking place within your university community, for example, via staff meetings, or newsletters. You could also share this Guide.

I've spoken to students about what adjustments to make, and they've requested one-to-ones remotely, which I've happily accommodated

Survey respondent



- Consider facilitating events to allow fasting students to break their fast together (known as Iftar). This may be especially beneficial for international students without family support, or when Ramadan falls in winter and the fast ends during working hours. Contact your institutions' faith leaders to discuss how you could do this. You can also find guidance on the [Global Ministries website](#) and the [Church of England website](#).
- Consider decorating communal areas to help celebrate Ramadan. This may help Muslim students and staff to feel a sense of belonging. A printable banner and posters about Ramadan are available to use via the National Teaching Repository¹⁶.

6) Be Inclusive and make Sustainable Change

- Some national holidays in the UK are structured around major Christian celebrations, namely Christmas and Easter, while major celebrations in other religions are not usually taken into account. Knowing when other major religious holidays or practices take place will be helpful when considering how to support students who belong to other religious groups.
- Consider using an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion calendar to establish when major religious festivals will occur each year. An example calendar can be found on the [Shap Working Party on World Religions in Education website](#). Having this calendar available could prompt discussions around potential changes needed to take into account religious festivals in teaching and learning.
- Propose a standing agenda item in important committees, for example, 'religious observance', to ensure development of sustainable changes that create inclusive teaching and learning for religious students.
- Work with your University's Chaplaincy when planning key dates like assessment deadlines and exams. They might be able to help identify student groups who would be adversely impacted and suggest mitigation strategies. Remind students of the chaplaincy service as a resource for support and advocacy for all students

Supporting Students on a Work Placement

Respondents to our survey indicated that supporting students who are on placement during Ramadan can be a complex issue. However, respondents shared many different ways in which they had supported students, in addition to the points made above.

1) Find out about the experiences of fasting students on placement during Ramadan

- What did students do to meet the demands of the placement while also observing Ramadan?

Printable information, banner, and posters about Ramadan can be found [here](#)



Better awareness amongst staff [is needed] and celebrating it like Christmas is celebrated with decorations etc.

Survey respondent



- What support was available?
- What was difficult for them?
- What else could have been done to help them?

2) Discuss Ramadan with placement coordinators and managers

- What accommodations might be available?
- What is the potential impact of those accommodations on clients / students / patients?
- How can the impact of accommodations be evaluated?

3) Share your own experience of supporting fasting students who are on placement with your course leader(s)

- Discuss your own experience of working with placement organisations and supporting fasting students with your course leader(s).
- Find out what subject specific guidance or sector norms exist for placement students, for example, is there any guidance from professional bodies or examples of good practice available from other educational institutions?
- You could facilitate a three-way meeting between placement provider and your course leader(s) to surface specific issues and focus on identifying practical solutions.

4) Construct a policy to support fasting students who are on placement

- This will surface issues and concerns across stakeholders, and support the design of longer term strategies to support fasting students. An effective policy will help to ensure that placements are conducted effectively and to the benefit of the institution, host organisation and their clients / students / patients.

Conclusion and Future Steps

We hope that this brief evidence-based Guide will enable educators to make practical changes to their teaching and learning practices to support Muslim students who are fasting during Ramadan.

In the future, we will be developing a comparable evidence-based Guide for students. We also aim to publish a journal article based on the evidence gathered for this project. If you would like to be involved in either of these projects, please get in touch with the project lead whose contact details can be found on the Author page. We would particularly welcome hearing from students or staff with lived or relevant experience of fasting and / or Ramadan.

The key message from this Guide is the importance of initiating discussions with Muslim students: ask them directly about what



support they would find useful, without making assumptions, and let them know what support is available.

We hope that by making these changes, educators can create a more inclusive environment that will enable Muslim students who are fasting to feel included and supported during Ramadan.

References (1-3: [return to p3](#)), (4-11: [return to p5](#)), (12-15: [return to p6](#)), (16: [return to p11](#))

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Appendix

Methodology

The evidence behind this Guide was collected from a survey between December 2024 and January 2025. It was developed by the project team, and piloted by members of our Muslim panel. To maximise response rates, the survey was designed to take just 5 minutes to complete. It was distributed primarily by email among predominantly teaching-focused academic networks, both nationally and within the authors' institutions. Ethical approval was received from Oxford Brookes University.

Demographics

We received 287 responses. The sample can be described as follows (percentages rounded to the nearest whole number):

Religion

- No religion = 46%
- Christian = 30%
- Muslim = 10%
- Prefer not to say = 7%
- Other (including Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish) = 6%

Gender

- Woman = 66%
- Man = 27%
- Prefer not to answer = 5%
- Non-binary or in another way = 2%

Respondent's Role

- Lecturer/Senior Lecturer = 59%
- Reader/Principal Lecturer/Assistant Professor/Professor = 23%
- Other (including Demonstrators, Teaching Fellows, Study skills tutors) = 11%
- Institutional Leader = 6%
- No response = 1%

Academic Discipline (by cluster)

- Social Sciences = 43%
- Health and Social Care = 20%
- STEM = 12%
- Arts and Humanities = 7%
- Academic Support and Development = 4%
- Unclassifiable (instances of non- or unclear responses and complex responses that spanned discipline clusters) = 14%

Location

- UK HEI = 80%
- Non-UK HEI = 2%
- HEI (not specified) = 4%
- Non-HEI = 2%
- Unclassifiable = 1%
- No response = 11%



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