

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI) POLICY

(Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy)

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"SILK ROAD" INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF TOURISM AND CULTURAL HERITAGE EQUALITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI) POLICY

1. Introduction

The "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage is firmly committed to the principles of creating equal opportunities for all and ensuring diversity and inclusion. This policy was developed in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan and international standards, and it is aimed at strengthening the principles of equality and non-discrimination across all faculties and departments of the university. Sustainable Development Goals (specifically, SDG 5-Gender Equality and SDG 10-Reduced Inequalities), encouraging the "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage to contribute to the achievement of these global goals. The QS Sustainability ranking system also considers the efforts of higher education institutions toward equality and inclusivity - in particular, the existence of an official EDI policy at the university is one of this ranking's indicators.

The national legal framework for this policy is rooted in the principles of equality established by the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan and its related legislation. Article 18 of the Constitution firmly establishes that all citizens are equal before the law, regardless of their gender, race, nationality, language, religion, beliefs, social origin, or status, and that discrimination is prohibited. Similarly, Article 4 of the Law "On Education," adopted in 1997 (and amended in 2018), guarantees every individual the right to equal education, irrespective of gender, language, race, nationality, beliefs, religion, social origin, profession, social status, or length of residence in Uzbekistan.

In recent years, Uzbekistan has further improved its legislation on equality and inclusivity. The Law "On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men," adopted in 2019, officially enshrined the commitment to ensuring gender equality and prohibiting discrimination based on gender. To protect the rights of persons with disabilities, a new law, "On the Rights of

Persons with Disabilities," was adopted in 2020, and in 2021, Uzbekistan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. These international and national documents are being implemented at the university level, and the EDI policy of the "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage serves to put these principles into practice.

The university has already taken certain steps to create an inclusive environment. Specifically, the campus features special parking spaces for people with disabilities, ramps for building access (wheelchair-accessible ramps), and adapted sanitary and hygiene facilities (restrooms). The dormitory provides accessible accommodations for students with disabilities. Although the "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage does not yet have a dedicated center specializing in gender issues, the principle of equality between men and women is upheld in daily activities. Psychological support is provided to students and staff, which is also an important aspect of ensuring inclusivity within the community. These practices serve as the foundation for the introduction of this policy, which will now integrate them into a single, systemic approach.

2. Purpose and Scope

The primary objective of this policy is to create equal opportunities for all at the "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage, prevent all forms of discrimination, and foster an inclusive environment. The policy is implemented university-wide and applies equally to all faculties, departments, and divisions, as well as to all members of the university community - students, faculty, staff, and visitors. This document applies to all aspects of university life, from student admissions, the educational process, and scientific research, to personnel selection, hiring, and the performance of professional duties.

3. Protected Categories

This policy prohibits discrimination based on the following protected categories and guarantees equal treatment in each area:

Age: Opportunities are not limited based on a person's age. Both young and older members of the community will be treated with equal respect and consideration.

Gender: The "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage ensures equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, including men, women (and those who self-identify with a particular gender). Gender-based discrimination, including discriminatory treatment or violence against women, is not permitted.

Disability: The rights and interests of individuals with physical or mental disabilities are fully protected. Necessary accommodations and facilities will be provided for their education and employment, and no one will be excluded on the basis of disability.

Race/Ethnicity: Discrimination against any person based on their race, skin color, nationality, or ethnic origin is prohibited. The ethnic and cultural diversity within the university community is treated with respect.

Religion or Belief: Every individual's freedom of conscience - whether they adhere to a religion or not - is respected. No one will be subjected to pressure or denied equal treatment because of their religious beliefs or worldview.

Sexual Orientation: Discrimination based on a person's sexual orientation is strictly prohibited. All individuals, whether heterosexual, homosexual, or of any other orientation, are ensured a free and safe environment at the university.

Marital Status: Marital status, such as being married or unmarried, divorced, or having or not having children, does not affect any rights or privileges at the university. All individuals are considered equal regardless of their marital status.

Refugee status: The rights of refugees or persons with immigrant status are regulated by the laws and regulations of the Republic. They have equal rights and opportunities with other citizens at the university. Their special situation is understood, their integration is supported, and they are guaranteed protection from discrimination.

Pregnancy and maternity: Pregnant women, those on maternity leave, or mothers with young children shall not be discriminated against. Instead, necessary accommodations (such as academic leave, flexible class schedules, rooms for nursing mothers, and so on) will be provided, and measures will be taken to ensure that pregnancy or motherhood does not affect their academic or professional activities.

4. Principles

Through this policy, the "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage commits to upholding the following core principles:

Equality: Equal rights and opportunities are ensured in all aspects of university life. The foundation of this principle is to treat every individual impartially and fairly, and to provide equal access to resources and opportunities.

Non-Discrimination: It is guaranteed that no person will be discriminated against on any grounds (based on the protected categories listed above). The university prevents any form of discrimination, harassment, or imitation and takes decisive action against such occurrences.

Inclusivity: The "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage is comprised of a diverse body of students and staff, and it is important that each of them feels like a full-fledged member of the community. To achieve this, the university is working to make its material and technical resources and educational process more inclusive (for example, by providing infrastructure for people with disabilities and appropriate learning materials) and to foster a tolerant social environment.

Respect: Honoring the dignity of every individual and showing mutual respect are integral parts of the university's culture. Relationships among community members are based on mutual respect, courtesy, and cooperation, with a tolerant approach toward different worldviews and opinions.

5. Implementation Mechanisms

To effectively implement this policy, the "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage will introduce the following mechanisms.

Appointment of an EDI Officer: Once the policy is enacted, the university administration will appoint a person responsible for equality, diversity, and inclusivity issues (an EDI Coordinator). This officer will oversee the policy's implementation, coordinate relevant activities within faculties and departments, and handle inquiries related to EDI matters. While EDI functions are currently distributed among several departments, the newly appointed officer will centralize these activities and enhance their effectiveness.

Training and Education: Regular training sessions, seminars, and educational events on equality and inclusiveness will be held for university faculty, staff, and students. The goal of these activities is to raise awareness within the community, reduce unconscious bias, and develop skills for working in a diverse team. Based on an annual plan, the participation of all staff and students in these trainings will be ensured.

Policy Promotion and Information Dissemination: The text of this EDI policy will be widely distributed to the university community. An electronic version of the document will be published on the university website, and printed copies will be provided to departments. The content of this policy will be explained during the orientation process for newly admitted students and newly hired staff. Additionally, the principles of the EDI policy will be reflected in the university's internal regulations and manuals.

Complaint Mechanism: A dedicated complaint mechanism will be established for anyone who encounters a violation of this policy's principles, specifically in cases of discrimination or discriminatory treatment. Every student or employee has the right to contact the designated EDI officer or the relevant commission. Complaints will be reviewed in accordance with the principle of confidentiality, and no negative consequences (such as token measures or retaliation) will be permitted against the complainant. Based on the investigation's findings, necessary actions (disciplinary sanctions, corrective measures, etc.) will be taken, and support will be provided to the affected party.

6. Monitoring and Evaluation

The implementation of the EDI policy will be regularly monitored and evaluated.

Annual Report: At the end of each year, the EDI Officer will prepare a report on the state of equality and inclusivity at the university. The report will highlight the activities and training sessions conducted throughout the year, as well as achievements and identified issues. The report will also include statistical indicators (for example, gender ratios among students and employees, the number of students with disabilities, the number of training sessions held, complaints received, and the outcomes of their review). This report will be submitted to the Rector, discussed in general meetings, and, if necessary, made public.

EDI Metrics and Indicators: The University will introduce a special system of metrics to assess its performance in equality and inclusivity. For example, indicators may be established such as the diversity of the student body and new hires, the level of accessibility for persons with disabilities, the proportion of women in leadership positions, and the state of equality among students based on their socio-economic backgrounds. These metrics will be regularly analyzed, and their dynamics will be monitored year-on-year, which allows for measuring policy effectiveness and making necessary adjustments.

Policy Review: The EDI policy will be continuously improved. Every year (or once every two years), the policy will be reviewed based on its implementation results, community feedback, and legislative changes. If necessary, proposals for amendments and additions will be developed. Any changes to the policy will be approved in the prescribed manner (by the University Council or the relevant commission) and announced to the community.

2. Official Approval and Announcement.

This policy is **approved** (signed) by the Rector of the "Silk Road" International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage in the prescribed manner and **agreed** upon with the chairman of the university's trade union committee. After official approval, the document is assigned a corresponding **number and date** and published on the university's official website in the appropriate format. The text of the policy is prepared in the state language, Uzbek, and is published along with **its English translation** for an international audience.