

WOMEN'S UNIVERSITY IN AFRICA



**Quality
Assurance
Department**

Addressing gender disparity and fostering equity in higher education

549 Arcturus Road, Manresa
Park, Greendale, Harare,
Zimbabwe

DISABILITY POLICY

1. INTERPRETATION (DEFINITION OF TERMS)

Applicants

Refers to people applying for employment, for work and/or study and visitors will only be entitled to reasonable accommodation in a limited capacity whilst they are on campus relative to their specific need in relation to their activity. The request will be considered at the discretion of the WUA Disability Unit.

Assistive technology

This refers to appropriate aids, appliances, technologies and other support systems that facilitate optimum functioning and participation of persons with disabilities.

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers are often reflected in relation to stigmas arising from prejudicial thinking and unconscious bias, negative attitudes, behaviours and perceptions related to persons with disabilities. A result of attitudinal barriers faced by persons with disabilities is physical and emotional bullying – which impedes access to learning and can lead to a sense of isolation.

Barrier-free access

This recognises that every person has the right, without discrimination, to equitable treatment with respect to goods, services and facilities.

Communication

This includes languages, display of text, Braille, tacit communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as audio, plain language human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication including accessible information and communication technology.

Disability

This encompasses persons who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UN, 2006).

Disability Inclusion

Refers to a dual approach that addresses a person's needs related to the impairment and removes environmental barriers to participation, which includes attitudinal barriers.

Discrimination based on disability

Refers to imposing any distinction, exclusion or restriction of persons on the basis of disability which has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, on all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil, or any other field. It encompasses all forms of unfair discrimination, whether direct or indirect, including denial of reasonable accommodation.

Discrimination based on the Requirement of a Job:

Any fair discrimination based on the requirement of the particular job does not constitute unfair discrimination. A requirement of a job depends on the nature of the job and required qualifications. If such requirements can be shown, discrimination will be fair, for example: a person with extremely poor eyesight cannot be employed as a driver.

Enabling environment

Refers to interrelated infrastructure, built environments, institutional culture, policies, attitudes, information and communication technologies and systems that should be in place to facilitate participation of persons with disabilities.

Equalizing opportunities

This is for inclusion and participation involves the process through which the various systems of society and the environment, such as service, activities, information and documentation are made available to all (World Programme of Action) (UN 1982).

Mainstreaming disability

A strategy through which the rights, requirements, concerns and experiences of persons living with disabilities are made an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social sphere to enable all persons living with disabilities benefit equally and that inequality is not perpetuated

Zimbabwean Sign Language

The visual and gestural language that is the first or preferred language in Zimbabwe of the distinct linguistic and cultural group of people who are deaf.

2. PURPOSE

The Women's University in Africa (WUA) is committed to supporting the achievement of gender equality in Zimbabwe and throughout Africa. The rights of women and girls are alienable, integral, and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms. In fostering gender equality and reducing gender disparity in higher education as stated in the Women's University Charter, WUA recognises the need to acknowledge the diversity of women and men who interact with the university and differ in terms of age, ethnicity, religious affiliation, disability, and other social differences. Therefore, WUA has the role and mandate to establish and implement a Disability Policy that would be consonant with the international, regional and national instruments. This policy outlines the University's commitment to creating and fostering a culture in which students, staff and visitors are treated fairly and are not disadvantaged because of their disability. The Disability Policy intention is to create and maintain parity in consultation with students and staff living with disabilities to ensure access to education and the University's resources.

The Disability Policy resonates with the Women's University in Africa Transformational Strategy 2023-2027 which called for the establishment of a Gender and Diversity Centre. There is the Gender and Diversity Policy that reflects the University's commitment to proactively advance equality and inclusive practices in staff and student recruitment and admissions processes, research activity, teaching and learning, within the campus environment, professional services the university offers, and community engagement initiatives. Against this background the University strives to create an enabling learning and occupational environment in consultation with students and staff with disabilities, where their learning and career aspirations are supported and enabled by the University and where their talents are identified, nurtured and developed.

This policy and the benefits afforded by it are based upon voluntary disclosure and self-identification, unless the disability is visible and self-explanatory. The University reserves its right to verify a person's disability status based on medical evidence, should it deem it necessary

2.1 Policy Objectives

The WUA Disability Policy seeks to:

- Provide a framework for availing resources for disability inclusion in all spheres of University life;
- Remove inequalities experienced by disabled persons by defining access as including physical and social aspects; and
- Address cultural, physical, social and other barriers that prevent people with disabilities from entering, being employed and developing their careers in the University

2.2 Policy Frameworks

This Disability policy draws from Zimbabwe's commitment to various international, regional and domestic policy frameworks on gender equality and diversity inclusion which aim to achieve substantive equality between women and men as outlined below.

International Policy Framework: Zimbabwe is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) which she ratified in 2013. Various international human rights instruments, which promote equity policies and non-discriminatory practices. Zimbabwe is also committed to Agenda 2030 of leaving no one behind through Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Agenda 2030, of leaving no one behind. The SDGs have opened doors of opportunities, participation and recognition for people with disabilities. SDGs 4, 8, 10, 11 and 17 speak specifically to disability.

National Policy Framework: Zimbabwe has made strides in creating policies and laws that enshrine respects that rights of persons living with disabilities. The **Constitution** of Zimbabwe (sections 22 and 83) has a strong commitment to ensuring that persons living with disabilities enjoy their rights and are treated with respect and dignity. The Disability Policy also draws from the Labour Relations Act **Labour Relations Act** [Chapter 28:01] which provides legal provisions regarding diversity, equality, inclusivity, non-discrimination and fair labour standards.

The 2021 **National Disability Policy** is another key domestic policy framework that acknowledges the diversity of human experience, by promoting the meaningful inclusion of persons with disabilities in the national development agenda. Non-discrimination, respect for difference and human diversity, equality of opportunity, and gender equality are some of the key principles that underpin the National Disability Policy. Zimbabwe is also implementing the five-year **National Development Strategy (NDS 1)** for the period 2021-2025, which provides a roadmap towards the realisation of the nation's Vision 2030 of an Empowered and Prosperous Upper Middle-Income Society by 2030.

The outlined international, regional, and national policy and legislative framework and the prevailing social, economic and political developments provide a strong basis for WUA to promote inclusivity, gender equality, equity, and diversity through the Disability Policy.

At institutional level, this policy document shall be viewed in conjunction with the WUA Charter (**Statutory Instrument 130 of 2004**) with its provisions on inclusive and gender sensitive education, the WUA Transformational Strategy (2023 – 2027), Human Resources Policy and Procedures Manual, and other policies within the organisation. The WUA Disability Policy will therefore, serve as a guide to the University on all matters pertaining to disability management and form the basis for the strategies to be used to achieve work place diversity, equality, inclusion and empowerment of both women and men living with disability.

3. SCOPE

This policy document applies to students, staff members and other university stakeholders and shall guide university policies and operational practices.

4. PRINCIPLES GUIDING THE POLICY

The University commits to include persons with disabilities in a meaningful way in its work, and to effectively incorporate a disability-inclusive approach in all its research, policies, programmes, projects and operations. The University reaffirms that persons with disabilities have the same universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, including labour rights, as all persons. This is consistent with the Declaration of Philadelphia that affirms that “all human beings, irrespective of race, creed or sex, have the right to pursue both their material well-being and their spiritual development in conditions of freedom and dignity, of economic security and equal opportunity” and follows the human-centred approach. The principles set out below will guide the implementation of this policy:

a) **Employment and non-discrimination**

- WUA will ensure that discrimination, stigma, violence and harassment on the basis of disability are not tolerated, including multiple and intersecting discrimination based on race, colour, sex, gender, religion, political or other opinion, national extraction, social or ethnic origin, language, age, sexual orientation and discrimination by association.
- WUA will strive to attract, recruit, retain and promote the career development of staff with disabilities, including through the provision of reasonable accommodation, whether in the office or teleworking.
- When advertising for vacant posts in the organisation it shall be mandatory to flight an advert with a statement to support qualified people with disability to apply (e.g. this organisation is an equal opportunities employer, qualified candidates with disabilities are encouraged to apply).

b) **Social dialogue and consultation**

- WUA shall ensure respect for social dialogue, and consult the workers’ committee and students’ representative council in the application of this policy, insofar as it has an impact on the conditions of service of staff members and students.
- The University will consult and involve in a meaningful way, including through the workers’ committee, staff members with disabilities and staff members who have dependants with disabilities, students and alumni with disabilities, particularly on matters involving their career development, well-being, social benefits and health coverage.

c) **Accessibility**

- WUA shall promote physical and digital accessibility both at all campuses through the implementation of Universal Design principles, and through the proactive identification, removal and prevention of barriers.
- WUA shall ensure the accessibility of all WUA meetings, conferences and events, whether they are conducted face to face or virtually.

d) **Mainstreaming and targeting**

- The University shall mainstream disability inclusion in projects, programmes and operations, complemented by targeted interventions for persons with disabilities,

with meaningful engagement from organizations of persons with disabilities in the design and implementation.

5. POLICY PROVISIONS

5.1 Procurement

- WUA shall promote disability-inclusive procurement of goods and services, including for employment of contractors.

5.2 Capacity development and communications

- WUA shall build capacity on disability inclusion, including through awareness raising and disability management training, for university management and all staff and students to help shape an organizational culture that values all persons.
- Ensure that internal and external communications are inclusive and respectful of persons with disabilities, and are available in accessible formats.
- WUA will ensure access to information and communication services to staff, students, and visitors with disabilities – including appropriate, tactile signage, high contrast signage on notice boards, circulars, library databases, learning materials, and electronic media. The University will strive to maximize, through appropriate dissemination of information, opportunities for staff and students with disabilities to participate in all University wide consultation and debate and in grievance mechanisms and decision-making processes.

5.3 Disclosure of disability, record keeping and data management

- The University is committed to creating an institutional culture in which disclosure of disability provides persons with disabilities the opportunity to access relevant services provided by the university. Disclosure of disability is necessary where a student/staff member/visitor requests support.
- Staff are encouraged to disclose their disabilities to Deputy Registrar Human Resources at the time of appointment. Staff already employed, who acquire a disability are encouraged to declare their disability by updating their staff profile details in the Deputy Registrar Human Resources to ensure that relevant services can be provided to them.
- Students are required to disclose their disability status to the Admissions Department, Dean of Students and to the WUA Disability Unit in order to access services provided by the Unit.

5.4 Access to the built environment

- The University endorses the principle of Universal Design as a feature on all new infrastructure development and will progressively formulate and implement standards and guidelines which ensure that Universal Design Principles are applied in the design, construction and/or maintenance of all buildings, thoroughfares, facilities, security systems and warning notification systems and all other infrastructures for which the University is responsible.

- The Department of Works and Estates will endeavour to ensure compliance to the National Building Standards. The Department will therefore progressively develop and implement a comprehensive campus-wide strategy to address physical and infrastructural barriers for persons with disabilities. In order to do this, the University will budget each year for retrofitting of access solutions. The University in consultation with the WUA Disability Unit will provide an oversight to the Department of Works and Estates in order to ensure compliance with the regulations and universal design principles.
- The University's emergency evacuation procedures should incorporate measures to ensure the safe evacuation for persons with disabilities. During the implementation of these procedures the WUA Disability Unit will play a consultative and facilitative role. This will include but not be limited to Emergency Evacuation Drills for each Faculty and Departments.
- WUA will avail clearly marked parking space for use by staff, students and visitors with permanent and significant mobility impairments and for those coping with serious health conditions which may not be permanent.

5.5 Accessible digital technology

- The University will progressively and within its available resources, provide up-to-date adaptive and assistive technology for students and staff with disabilities where possible.

5.6 Teaching and learning support for students and staff with disabilities

- The University is committed to the principle of accessible education for the learning needs of students with disabilities and recognizes that this may in some cases entail modifying, substituting or supplementing curricula and course work requirements, including alternative but equivalent assessment modes, ensuring at all times that academic standards are not compromised and that students will graduate with the requisite skills and competencies.
- The University will address the assessment and case management needs of students who wish to apply for extra time and other concessions (such as the use of a computer and access to a secluded writing space) during tests and examinations.
- The University, through relevant faculties and departments, shall provide the necessary support to teaching staff with disabilities to enable them to perform their teaching duties adequately.

5.7 The WUA Disability Unit

The Women's University in Africa shall establish a Disability Unit which shall be the hub of academic, social and inclusive services for all students and staff with disabilities at the University. The Unit will offer the following services among others:

- Research on disability and inclusion issues;
- Assisting student with disabilities in the registration processes;
- Assisting students with disabilities find suitable and appropriate peers to help them navigate life at WUA;

- Training visually impaired students and staff in mobility, orientation and navigation of the university environment;
- Offering inclusive support to all students and staff with disabilities during their university lives;
- Provide assistive devices for use by students and staff with disabilities;
- Raising disability awareness during student and staff orientation programmes so that the university community has an understanding of disabilities to enable them to work with students and staff with disabilities;
- Partnering with other offices, departments, faculties, and external partners to support physical and technological access to students with disabilities;
- Determining and implementing reasonable academic, workplace and visitors' access and inclusion mechanisms for persons with disabilities;
- Developing positive self-image in students and staff with disabilities;
- Maximising use of ICT to ensure success for transition of students with disabilities to reach their potential and become flourishing citizens who make successful transition to adulthood;
- Providing teaching and learning and other materials in braille for use by visually impaired students and teaching staff;
- Transcribing braille material by students into print for lecturers to enable them to read the material;
- Training in Sign Language for students and staff to facilitate effective communication with internal and external stakeholders with hearing impairment;
- Consultations on strategies to provide access and disability inclusion.

5.8 Human and Financial resources

- WUA will ensure the provision, within the programmes and budgets, of adequate human and financial resources for disability inclusion for the implementation of this policy and its strategies.

5.9 Monitoring and evaluation

- WUA shall collect disability-disaggregated data, in a manner that maintains confidentiality, to inform the design, implementation and monitoring of policies, programmes, projects and operations. The University shall develop a disability inclusion checklist to enable the collection of disability disaggregated data.
- University shall regularly monitor and evaluate the application of this policy and the strategies through which it will be implemented.
- WUA shall carry out periodical reviews and, if necessary, revise the policy to address gaps that are identified and future needs that arise, taking into account recommendations from the monitoring and evaluation process, and in consultation with all those concerned.


6 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ROLE

RESPONSIBILITY

Appointment Board and Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To promote disability inclusion within all university working policies and practices. ▪ To promote diversity through creating employment opportunities for people with disabilities including supporting their promotion to leadership positions.
Gender and Diversity Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To facilitate students and staff awareness of disability inclusion issues. ▪ To establish and maintain the Disability Unity
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To avail financial resources for disability inclusion activities.
IT Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To avail disability sensitive technologies/applications for students and staff with disabilities. ▪ To design a system that generates disability-disaggregated statistics.
Marketing, Communications and Public Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To design disability inclusive communication materials. ▪ To make visible students/staff with disabilities in university marketing materials.
Department of Works and Estates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To ensure that physical infrastructure of the university and SBUs is accessible to people with disabilities.
Admissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To collect disability disaggregated student enrolment data.
Quality Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To ensure quality provision of facilities and services to people with disabilities.

7 DOCUMENT VERSION MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL

Document Name	Disability Policy	
Version Reference	1.0	
Document Owner	Gender and Diversity Centre	
Approved by		
Date of Approval		
Review Date	5 years	