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Welfare Policy

This policy aims to promote the basic physical and mental well-being of both students and staff member at STC Higher Education. It also offers specific provisions in order to assure as much as possible: equal opportunities in situation of disability, respect for diverse sexual orientation and faith, tolerance zero for bullying and harassment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 STC strives to be a learning environment where equality, diversity, respect, dignity, inclusion, non-discrimination and safety are valued by all the students and staff.
- 1.2 Through these policies, STC aims to ensure that all students and staff are treated with respect and dignity and their rights are safeguarded so they are able to thrive and achieve their fullest potential throughout their time at STC.
- 1.3 These policies are to be made available to all students once they enrol as students and to staff members when they are employed with STC. It is their responsibility to read these policies and adhere to them.
- 1.4 Any student or staff member who does not act in accordance with these policies will be held accountable and subject to discipline and consequences as outlined in the
- 1.5 These policies function in conjunction with the laws of Malta.

2. STUDENT WELFARE

- 2.1 STC understands that students can face various issues during their student life. These include but are not limited to: personal, family, mental and physical health, financial, adjustment, relationships, work-life balance and study issues. The responsibility for student welfare lies with every member of the STC community.
- 2.2 Students are responsible for their own welfare and for seeking support as and when appropriate. Students are to inform STC about any circumstances that they would like to receive support from STC about.
- 2.3 STC also endeavours to identify those students who have difficulties and provide them or refer them to the relevant support services. STC staff are the ones who are in direct contact with the students, and thus they could be more likely to become aware of particular issues the students are facing. While the staff is not expected to have expertise in student welfare support, they are to know where to direct students for help.

3. STUDENT WELFARE OFFICER

- 3.1 To support student wellbeing, STC has established the role of the Student Welfare Officer.
- 3.2 The Student Welfare Officer's role is to provide social and moral support to students, address barriers to learning and to strengthen the students' safety net. This can be done through one-to-one meetings with students, where the students can discuss their concerns. The Student Welfare Officer helps them address their concerns and where necessary refer them to the appropriate support services. Follow up sessions or mediation sessions (between 2 or more students or between students and staff members) can also be carried out if necessary. If the Welfare Officer needs to discuss matters arising from a one-to-one meeting with the STC Administration, this can be done once the individual gives written permission to do so.
- 3.3 All information discussed with the Welfare Officer is strictly confidential unless the individual poses a risk of harm to self or to others.
- 3.4 The Student Welfare Officer also works to develop and promote students' welfare. This includes training and development sessions or workshops that address soft skills. Relevant topics can be suggested by STC staff or identified based on relevance or student needs.

- 3.5 The Student Welfare Officer also holds feedback sessions throughout the academic year, so that students have the opportunity to provide feedback about their experience at STC. Anonymous feedback is passed on to STC administration so that where possible, the students' feedback and suggestions are taken into consideration to improve upon.
- 3.6 Staff can refer students to the Welfare Officer (with the student's permission) if they have any concerns, recognise any signs of distress or if the students disclose that they are facing challenging circumstances.
- 3.7 To ensure that the role of the Student Welfare Officer is carried out in the best way possible, the person employed needs to possess the relevant competencies and skills.

4. DISABILITY AND ACCESS ARRANGEMENTS

- 4.1 STC aims to be a friendly and welcoming campus where students and staff work in a supportive environment which enables them to participate fully. This includes people who are living with a disability or long-term health condition.
- 4.2 Disability refers to a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder one's full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (Equality Act). A long-term health condition means a condition lasting for at least 12 months, that is likely to last at least 12 months or longer or may even last for the rest of a person's life. A disability can arise from a wide range of impairments, including (but not limited to) the following:
 - 4.2.1 Sensory impairments, such as those affecting sight or hearing
 - 4.2.2 Impairments with fluctuating or recurring effects such as depression, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic fatigue syndrome (ME) and epilepsy
 - 4.2.3 Progressive conditions, such as motor neurone disease, muscular dystrophy, forms of dementia
 - 4.2.4 Organ specific conditions, including respiratory problems, such as asthma, and cardiovascular diseases, including thrombosis, stroke and heart disease.
 - 4.2.5 Cancer, HIV/AIDs, Multiple Sclerosis (MS) are covered from the point of diagnosis, even if symptoms have yet to occur
 - 4.2.6 Specific learning differences, such as Autistic Spectrum Conditions (ASC), Dyslexia and Dyspraxia
 - 4.2.7 Mental health conditions, such as schizophrenia, eating disorders, bipolar affective disorders, obsessive compulsive disorders, personality disorders. Depressive illnesses can amount to disabilities where they are long-term.
- 4.3 STC wants to ensure that students and staff with disabilities or long-term health needs have access to facilities and a learning environment that are, as much as possible, akin to that of their non-disabled colleagues.
- 4.4 Disclosing a disability to STC is a personal decision and it is the individual's choice if and when they decide to do so. Although it is beneficial to disclose such information as early as possible, this can be done at any time and individuals can decide to which details of their disability they want to be disclosed or kept confidential. STC works hard to be as accessible as possible. If a disability is disclosed, it would make it possible to explore opportunities to implement appropriate support. If individuals choose not to disclose their disability, this may have implications for the support that is available to them.
- 4.5 To increase equality, STC:
 - 4.5.1 ensures that prospective and current students and staff with disabilities are not discriminated against;
 - 4.5.2 provides, wherever reasonably possible, inclusive learning and teaching practices and access to services and facilities;
 - 4.5.3 promotes a positive studying and working environment for disabled students and staff;

- 4.5.4 considers alternative exam arrangements and alternative forms of assessment (for more details see *Special Considerations Policy*)
- 4.6 The following issues are taken into consideration whenever a student requests or needs exam arrangements and alternative forms of assessment:
- 4.6.1 When students require adjustments to the assessment process to give them an equal opportunity, STC ensures that over-compensation (which would give a student an unfair advantage over other students) does not occur.
- 4.6.2 Students are to inform STC about their needs in sufficient time to enable adequate adjustments to be made to the assessment process.
- 4.6.3 Wherever possible, STC will take into considerations any access arrangements that the student has obtained in their prior education, evaluate whether these are still relevant, necessary and viable for their current situation.
- 4.6.4 Each request is reviewed on an individual basis and the NCC policy for Special Considerations is followed.
- 4.7 Requests for accessibility of the learning environment and for alternative access arrangements for exams are to be submitted at the beginning of each academic year together with a recent assessment (not older than 2 years) that backs the claims for support being made. Each request is considered on a case by case basis and while the support provided in previous education is taken into consideration, it cannot be assumed that the same type of support will be provided.
- 4.8 Such requests need to be made for each academic year and an updated report provided if the report is older than 2 years.

5. SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

- 5.1 STC students and staff deserve equitable treatment regardless of their gender identity and/or biological sex. STC recognizes the existence of gender identities outside the male-female binary.
- 5.2 STC endeavours to develop and implement inclusive educational strategies and services, to ensure that sexual and gender minorities are welcomed and treated with respect and dignity.
- 5.3 STC aims to create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all students and staff, where all individuals who choose to be open about their gender identity can feel respected, safe, welcome and included. It also strives to remove any unnecessary gender distinctions.
- 5.4 All sexual and gender minority students and staff have the right to:
- 5.4.1 be treated fairly, equitably, and with dignity and respect;
- 5.4.2 have their confidentiality protected and respected;
- 5.4.3 self-identification and determination;
- 5.4.4 freedom of conscience, expression, and association;
- 5.4.5 be included and represented in a positive and respectful manner
- 5.4.6 have equitable access to the support, services, and protections provided to heterosexual students and staff;
- 5.4.7 have avenues of recourse (without fear of reprisal) available to them when they are victims of harassment, prejudice, discrimination, intimidation, bullying, and/or violence.
- 5.5 STC makes every effort possible to support students and staff members who are coming out or transitioning.

- 5.6 STC ensures that any personal records match the individuals' gender identity and expression while ensuring confidentiality.
- 5.7 Single use, all-gender bathrooms are available on campus to enhance accessibility for transgender and binary non-conforming individuals.

6. BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

- 6.1 STC does not tolerate any form of bullying or harassment. It is committed to eliminating any form of intimidation.
- 6.2 Students and staff have a right to study and work in an environment which is free from harassment and bullying and where their dignity is respected.
- 6.3 Harassment refers to unwelcome physical, verbal or non-verbal behaviour which denigrates, ridicules or is intimidatory on the basis of disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, creed, colour, race or ethnic origin. Such action(s) that are unwanted and unwelcome by the recipient constitute harassment.
- 6.4 General harassment involves actions, behaviours, comments or physical contact which is found objectionable or which causes offence; it can result in the recipient feeling threatened, humiliated or patronised and it can create an intimidating environment.
- 6.5 Sexual harassment involves unwelcome behaviours of a sexual nature or other sex based conduct which are offensive to the person involved and causes that person to feel threatened, humiliated or embarrassed. Sexual harassment may be experienced by men or women (students and staff alike) as a result of the conduct of persons of the same sex or of different sex. Examples of sexual harassment include:
 - 6.5.1 requests for sexual favours, including implied or overt
 - 6.5.2 promises of preferential treatment;
 - 6.5.3 offensive gestures or comments;
 - 6.5.4 sexually-orientated jibes, innuendo or jokes;
 - 6.5.5 unwanted physical contact;
 - 6.5.6 the display of sexually offensive visual material
- 6.6 Racial harassment includes actual or threatened physical abuse or it may involve offensive jokes, verbal abuse, language, graffiti or literature of a racist or sectarian nature or offensive remarks about a person's skin colour, physical characteristics or religion. It may also include exclusion, patronising remarks, unfairness directed towards a person from an ethnic or religious minority.
- 6.7 Bullying involves the intimidation or belittling of someone which leaves the recipient feeling hurt, upset, vulnerable or helpless. It is often inextricably linked to the areas of harassment described above. Examples of bullying include:
 - 6.7.1 Unjustified criticism of an individual's personal or professional performance, shouting or criticising an individual in front of others.
 - 6.7.2 Spreading malicious rumours or making malicious allegations.
 - 6.7.3 Intimidation or ridicule of individuals with disabilities and /or learning difficulties.
 - 6.7.4 Ignoring or excluding an individual from the team / group
- 6.8 Anyone who claims that they have been harassed or bullied can report this as per the procedure detailed below. Allegations related to harassment and bullying are dealt with promptly and sensitively. While there is no deadline for reporting complaints related to harassment and bullying, individuals are encouraged to do so promptly so that any evidence related to the circumstances is more likely to be available.

6.9 When a student or a staff member reports an incident of harassment or bullying, STC will conduct an investigation. The Student Welfare Officer together with the Administration & Academic Manager will interview the individuals involved and anyone else who may provide information related to the incident. All the parties involved will be given sufficient opportunity to be heard and present information. The investigators will report their findings to both parties and to the STC Management. If it is concluded that harassment or bullying has occurred, remedial action that might also include disciplinary action is be taken. Options include verbal reprimand, letters of warning, suspension, or even dismissal depending on the nature and the severity of the occurrence.

7. FAITH

7.1 STC welcomes and includes students and staff from a wide range of backgrounds, cultural traditions, and spiritual beliefs. STC strives to accommodate the needs of students who observe religious holy days other than those already accommodated for by ordinary scheduling and holidays.

7.2 Students are to inform the STC administration about upcoming religious observances and anticipated absences. STC will make every reasonable effort to accommodate such requests and avoid scheduling coursework, lectures, or other compulsory activities during these days. However, this is not always possible, and students should be aware of attendance regulations outlined in the behaviour policy when making decisions about missing lectures. When students have to miss any coursework that is not compulsory, they can be given the opportunity to make up for any work that they miss. Since exam times are set by NCC, it is the student's choice whether to sit for an exam or to wait for the next assessment cycle. The student needs to give 3 months' notice in advance to STC in case of postponing an exam to the next assessment cycle.

7.3 STC will not request any documentation from faith leaders to support such requests as this would imply a questioning of the sincerity of the religious practice, and not all faith traditions necessarily involve participation in an organized community.

7.4 No student should be placed at a disadvantage because of their religious observances. However, when accommodating one group, it is necessary to ensure that this does not disadvantage other groups.

8. SOURCES

- <https://www.tcd.ie/about/policies/>
- <https://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/policies-guidelines/accommodation-religious/>
- <https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/antiharassment-policy-and-complaint-procedures.html>
- <https://concordia.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AD1225-Sexual-Orientation-and-Gender-Identity-Policy.pdf>
- <https://www.ualberta.ca/sexual-gender-diversity/academic>
- <https://www.ucd.ie/t4cms/Gender%20Identity%20Policy%20Final%20June%202017.pdf>
- <https://www.surrey.ac.uk/sites/default/files/disability-policy.pdf>
- https://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_434215_en.pdf
- <https://intranetsp.bournemouth.ac.uk/policy/Student-Welfare-Policy.pdf>
- <https://www.westminster.ac.uk/sites/default/public-files/general-documents/Student-Code-of-Conduct-2018.pdf>
- https://meae.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MSDC/Documents/2015%20HREC%20Final/Bill%20-%20Equality%20Act.pdf
- NCC Special Considerations Policy