

Diversity and Equal Opportunity policy

OST – Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences



Issued by the university administration on October 19, 2021

Record of changes

Version	Reason for change	Name	Date
1	Issued by the university administration	-	10/19/2021

Table of contents

1	BASIS	4
1.1	Legal basis	4
1.2	The university's internal principles	4
2	INTRODUCTION	5
2.1	Strategic integration	5
2.2	How diversity and equal opportunity are understood at OST	6
2.3	Guiding principles for promoting diversity and equal opportunity at OST	6
3	AREAS OF ACTION	8
3.1	Quality and culture	8
3.2	Staff	8
3.3	Students	8
3.4	Teaching, applied research and services	9
3.5	Accessibility	9

APPENDIX: EXPLANATION OF TERMS

1 BASIS

1.1 Legal basis

The diversity and equal opportunity policy at OST (Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences – hereinafter “OST”) is based on the following legal principles:

International

- European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN - CRPD)

Federal legislation

- Swiss Constitution (BV)
- Swiss Federal Law on Equal Rights for the Disabled (BehiG)
- Swiss Federal Law on the Equality of Men and Women (GIG)
- Swiss Federal Law on the Support of Universities and Coordination in the Swiss University Sector (HFKG)
- Regulation of the University Council for Accreditation in the Swiss University Sector (HFKG)

Canton of St. Gallen

- Regulation on OST – Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences
- The canton of St. Gallen’s employment law

OST – Eastern Switzerland University of Applied Sciences

- OST University Statute
- OST Staff Regulations

1.2 The university’s internal principles

- Vision and mission
- Core values
- OST strategy: Organization and competition strategy
- Quality assurance strategy and concept

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Strategic integration

The Diversity and Equal Opportunity Policy is derived from the OST strategy (organization and competition strategy) and substantiates goal 6 on “Diversity and Equal Opportunity” and its five strategic agendas.

Goal	The University actively advocates for diversity and equal opportunity , campaigns against discrimination and promotes a culture of inclusion .
Agendas	<p>It achieves this goal by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. viewing differences regarding heritage, identity, orientation, experience, lifestyles and life situations as an opportunity and actively promoting diversity in the organization. <i>[promoting diversity]</i> 2. striving for a balanced ratio of genders in management and on the board. <i>[equality]</i> 3. striving for unobstructed access to infrastructure, teaching and learning opportunities and publications and thereby showing dedication to ensuring universal accessibility. <i>[accessibility]</i> 4. promoting working models and framework conditions that allow the demands of work, study, family and private life to be better reconciled. <i>[work-life balance]</i> 5. gaining national attention in diversity and equal opportunity through projects and publications. <i>[public image]</i>

The policy is integrated into the OST system of strategies as follows:

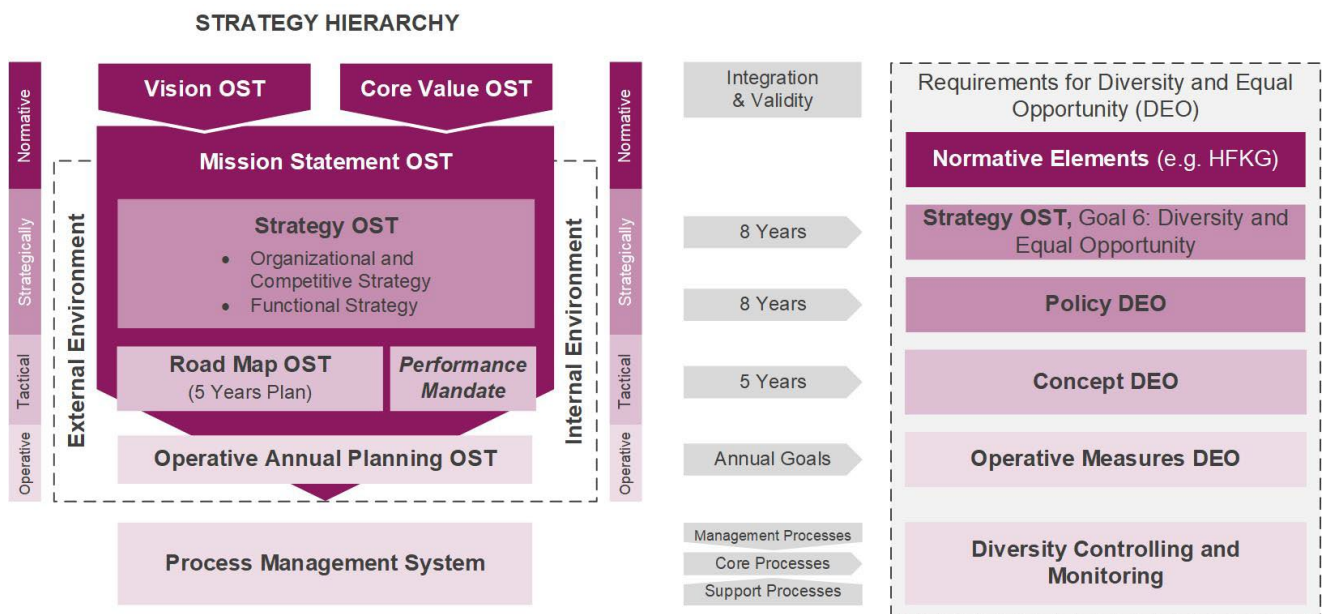


Diagram 1 – How the policy is integrated into the OST system of strategies

2.2 How diversity and equal opportunity are understood at OST

With its commitment to diversity and equal opportunity as core values, OST is expressing its appreciation and recognition of all university members with their different personalities and their individuality.

The University recognizes its social responsibility and actively advocates for diversity, equal opportunity, equality, non-discrimination and inclusion.

Diversity in combination with varying backgrounds, identities, orientations, skills, experiences, lifestyles and situations is seen as an enrichment and as an important resource that is crucial for the development of the University as an organization, for innovation, competitiveness and for fulfilling OST's mission.

In relation to diversity and the associated diversity of perspectives and an open-minded approach, the University recognizes the potential to develop innovative responses to current and future challenges in the world of work, research and study.

As an academic research organization, it analyzes and develops its structures, processes and practice with a view to fostering a university culture that is inclusive and offers equal opportunities. The OST contributes to ongoing further development of the ability of university members to remove stereotypes and prejudices and to promote a constructive approach to the heterogeneity of staff and students. The University strengthens awareness of discrimination and does not tolerate any inequality, discrimination or persecution of people.

With its diversity and equal opportunity policy, the OST is fulfilling the legal equality directive and is fulfilling quality assurance requirements as part of the institutional accreditation.

2.3 Guiding principles for promoting diversity and equal opportunity at OST

We are fostering a culture in the field of diversity and equal opportunity in line with the following guiding principles:

Perception and understanding of diversity

To understand diversity at OST, the categories gender, gender identity, physical or psychological impairment, ethno-cultural and social heritage, age, sexual orientation, religious and ideological beliefs and different lifestyles and situations, but also different academic and scientific cultures, are important guiding frameworks for us. The categories are shaped by societal factors and can have mitigating or aggravating effects on one another. They create societal inequalities and power structures and can control access to resources. Identifying these mechanisms and reflecting on the categorizations critically presents a fundamental requirement for guaranteeing equality of opportunity.

Promoting equality of opportunity and participation without discrimination

We actively promote equal opportunities, de facto gender equality¹, accessibility and access to resources and leadership positions. We create structural and cultural framework conditions to counteract stereotypes, prejudices and gender segregation and to establish a legal obligation. We put individuals at the forefront of our approach to diversity and enable participation with equality of opportunity.

¹ De facto equality means the effective realization of a legal claim in contrast with legal equality. This mission is formulated in HFKG and in the HFKG accreditation regulation.
DEO policy

Fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion

We have a university culture that is shaped by mutual respect and non-discrimination. We consciously promote and shape diversity in our university and foster a respectful approach towards all facets of human diversity and organizational differences. We are committed to a culture of inclusion, participation and transparency. In doing so, we take a cooperative approach and have an open dialog. We establish a creative and supportive environment for learning, teaching, research and scientific and societal discourse that enables all members of the university to evolve and further develop their skills.

Consciously recognizing social responsibility when dealing with diversity topics

As an institution that is aware of its social responsibility and wants to take on a pioneering role in future societal developments, we raise awareness among university members about current requirements and issues in relation to equality of opportunity, non-discrimination and inclusion. We help them to establish diversity competency, to break down their own prejudices and to foster their skills of critical reflection. We make diversity visible in our communications and refrain from reproducing stereotypes.

Using diversity to create opportunities for innovative capability and competitiveness

We appreciate diversity as a driving force for innovation and as a valuable resource. Therefore, we aim to recognize and promote the university members' diverse skills and potential and to deploy them in the best possible way to combat current and future challenges. We offer attractive study, work and research conditions and support the exchange of ideas and knowledge on an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary level, while also strengthening OST's position as an exemplary learning, teaching and work environment.

Cementing diversity as a quality criterion and cross-sectional task

We recognize diversity and equal opportunities as cross-sectional tasks and quality criteria. The University integrates the key aspects of diversity and equal opportunity into its legal, strategic and conceptual foundations and central processes and regularly monitors their implementation. The concepts of diversity and equal opportunity and of accessibility substantiate this policy. To implement these concepts, the University provides the relevant framework conditions and necessary resources.

3 AREAS OF ACTION

The policy defines topical, specialist areas of action that are relevant for different agendas:

3.1 Quality and culture

Equality of opportunity, non-discrimination and diversity as cross-sectional topics and quality criteria

– The University cements equal opportunities, non-discrimination and diversity into its foundations and central processes as cross-sectional topics and quality criteria. Therefore, it is making a significant contribution to developing a modern organization. Cementing this into the goal-setting and quality assurance process ensures that it is setting binding goals in accordance with the legal equality directive and the requirements of institutional accreditation. These are monitored regularly and, if necessary, they are adapted to enhance the efforts to promote diversity and equal opportunity.

Culture of inclusion and respect for diversity – The University promotes inclusion by cultivating a culture that recognizes diversity as a core value and fosters respectful and considerate behavior towards others. It raises awareness among leaders, employees and students about diversity, equal opportunity, equality and non-discrimination and promotes the relevant skills.

3.2 Staff

Staff management and development with equal opportunities – The University develops framework conditions and establishes processes that actively promote equal opportunities and diversity and counteract discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices. It promotes and fosters an environment that enables full utilization of the potential of all staff members.

Compatibility of work, family and private life – The University promotes family-friendly work and employment conditions and career options to ensure a healthy work-life balance for all those at the University. It continues to develop the foundations and processes as well as its university and management culture accordingly.

3.3 Students

Gender-sensitive career guidance and career path management – The University is undertaking targeted efforts to continually increase the proportion of underrepresented genders on its courses. It supports students with active and reflective career and life planning. The University strives to improve conditions for students and develop a student culture that makes it easier to reconcile the demands of studying, work, family and private life.

3.4 Teaching, applied research and services

Diversity-sensitive teaching, research and services – The University continues to develop teaching, training, research and service activities in the areas of gender, diversity and equal opportunities. It promotes diversity and equal opportunities as quality criteria in the entire performance mandate with its four core tenets.

3.5 Accessibility

Accessible and inclusive university – The University promotes unobstructed access and the equal opportunities for people with disabilities or chronic illness to participate in studies and work. It raises awareness of this and of disability and inclusion among all members of the university.

APPENDIX: EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Accessibility: Accessibility is understood to mean and unimpeded access to buildings, spaces, information, communication systems and technologies, services, resources, development perspectives and the relevant documents for all members of the university. Barriers are not only understood to be physical or technical limitations but also barriers related to attitudes and the environment.

Equal opportunity: [Equal opportunity means the right to equal-opportunity and self-determined access to development and life prospects, resources and chances of success.](#) Equal opportunity also includes a ban on discrimination.

Discrimination: Discrimination involves degrading, disadvantaging or persecuting persons on the basis of their gender, gender identity, physical or psychological impairment, ethno-cultural or social heritage, age, sexual orientation, religious or ideological views and different lifestyles and situations or because of other characteristics and conditions (e.g. pregnancy).

Diversity: Diversity is a concept from sociology and social psychology that aims to differentiate and recognize characteristics of groups and individuals. Diversity in terms of individuals is defined on the basis of various characteristics and dimensions.

Gender: Gender is a social construct that refers to the gender that a person feels themselves to be and embodies. This is different to “sex”, which is a person's gender assigned at birth based on physical characteristics. Therefore, gender refers to social, cultural and political components that have been known to change historically.

Inclusion: Inclusion refers to the continuous process of understanding shared values and framework conditions that allow different people access to the University and prevent exclusion. The main purpose of inclusion is to cement participation, equality and respect for diversity into the awareness and day-to-day activities of university members and to entrench it in the structures.