



## STUDENT ACCESS AND EQUITY POLICY

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## STUDENT ACCESS AND EQUITY POLICY

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. The Botswana Open University (BOU) is anchored on a student-centric organisational philosophy, which “makes students central to all its strategies, actions, internal linkages and operations, as well as all minute routine tasks...all functional layers of the organisation should converge towards the students.” (DCDM & EM, 2010, BOCODOL Organisation Review Report). As such, the University subscribes to the following principles:
  - 1.1.1. **Access & Equity** - nobody is excluded from learning based on their age, gender, race, religion, culture, language, geographic location, socio-economic background, disability and/or any other special circumstance;
  - 1.1.2. **Student-centredness** - learning design is based on students’ needs rather than the institution’s needs;
  - 1.1.3. **Lifelong learning** - everybody should have the opportunity to start or return to learning throughout life;
  - 1.1.4. **Flexibility** – students should be able to progress through programmes according to their own individual learning pace.
- 1.2. The Student Access & Equity Policy articulates BOU’s commitment to these principles. The Policy asserts BOU’s commitment to provision of flexible lifelong learning opportunities in a fair and equitable manner; allowing individual students to thrive academically; recognising their diversity and special circumstances. It defines a broad framework to create an enabling environment that assures the right of students to access relevant education and training opportunities without discrimination or prejudice.
- 1.3. The Policy provides a University-wide integrated approach to access, equity and diversity. Related University policies for reference include: Policy on Learners with Special Needs, the Internationalization Policy, the Guidance and Counselling Policy and the Student Conduct and Discipline Policy. In reporting sensitive information, students should refer to the Whistleblowing Policy for guidance.

## 2. DEFINITIONS

- 2.1. **Access** - the right or privilege to enter, approach and make use of opportunities, resources, services and products. Access to quality education experiences and resources and deliberate effort to eliminate barriers to education.
- 2.2. **Equity** - the quality of being fair and impartial and just; non-discrimination practices where people are treated without prejudice. No one should be excluded from enrolling with BOU on the basis of differentiation or circumstance
- 2.3. **Equality** - the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, or opportunities. No person should be judged or held back from any opportunity based on reasons such as race, colour, religion or gender.
- 2.4. **Discrimination** - bias, intolerance, unfairness, inequity, favouritism, the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people especially on grounds of race, class, age or gender.
- 2.5. **Inclusivity** - the intention of including many different people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized on the basis of their circumstance or ability such as gender, race, class, sexuality, disability. The fair treatment of all clients accessing the University products and services.

## 3. PURPOSE

- 3.1. This Policy serves as a pronouncement of BOU's commitment to open access and equity for its students. BOU believes that excellence will be achieved through appreciation of contributions made by every individual. The University endeavors to create an enabling environment that respects the diversity of students and assist them to achieve their full potential. This will be done by ensuring that students contribute fully, and derive maximum benefit and enjoyment from their involvement in the life of the University.
- 3.2. BOU therefore acknowledges the following basic rights for all students and prospective members of its community:
  - 3.2.1. to be treated with respect and dignity;
  - 3.2.2. to be treated fairly with regard to all procedures, assessments and choices;
  - 3.2.3. to receive encouragement to reach one's full potential.

#### 4. SCOPE

- 4.1. All members of the University community shall be expected to recognise and to act in accordance with students' rights in all its dealings.
- 4.2. As a multi-functional educational institution operating in a local, national and international context, BOU will work to ensure that all of its students, employees and visitors, as well as those who seek to apply to study with us or who have previously studied with us, are treated fairly and are not subjected to any discrimination by the University.
- 4.3. BOU is committed to providing equality of opportunity for all, irrespective of; age, gender, ethnicity (including race, colour and nationality), socio-economic class, disability, religion and belief, sexual orientation, marital status, special needs and/or any other circumstances.

#### 5. POLICY STATEMENT

The Botswana Open University is committed to providing an environment free from discrimination, bullying, harassment or victimisation, where all members of its community are treated with respect and dignity. It aims to create a culture of diversity within its community, providing a dynamic teaching and learning environment, where all students are valued for their contribution and individuality. The principles of nondiscrimination and equality of opportunity also apply to the way in which staff and students should treat each other including visitors, former staff and students and any other persons associated with the functions of the University. BOU is committed to complying with all relevant legislation and good practice. The Policy provides guidance on issues of fairness of practice to all students.

#### 6. IMPLEMENTATION

- 6.1. **The University Council** oversees the University's compliance with the Access and Equity Policy obligations.
- 6.2. **Executive Management** has the responsibility for ensuring that BOU staff and students comply with the requirements of this Policy.
- 6.3. **Students** have the responsibility to:
  - 6.3.1. Understand this policy and the related policies and procedures and to contact their Programme Coordinator or the Access and Equity Committee for clarity;

- 6.3.2. Challenge any behaviour that contravenes this Policy;
- 6.3.3. Report unacceptable behaviour in accordance with the code of conduct procedure or this Policy.
- 6.4. **Staff** has the responsibility to:
  - 6.4.1. Set a good example by treating all students of the University with dignity and respect;
  - 6.4.2. Correct unacceptable behavior;
  - 6.4.3. Ensure students know how to report discrimination, bullying and harassment;
  - 6.4.4. Ensure that reporting incidents does not result in victimization;
  - 6.4.5. Deal with complaints fairly, thoroughly, quickly and confidentially;
  - 6.4.6. Ensure that due consideration is given to access and equity within their sphere of influence.
- 6.5. **The Access and Equity Committee** has the responsibility to:
  - 6.5.1. Consider all existing and emerging equity legislation with a view to identifying relevant issues which are then used to inform policy review;
  - 6.5.2. Support the implementation of the University's Access and Equity objectives through involvement and consultation;
  - 6.5.3. Monitor data, analyse and review the Policy as necessary;
  - 6.5.4. Design and deliver training and awareness raising campaigns;
  - 6.5.5. Provide advice, support and guidance on related issues.

## 7. REVIEW

This policy shall be reviewed every three years or earlier as necessary.