



**Non-Discrimination and Harassment Policy
V1.0**

Introduction

ESSI Academy is fully committed to fostering an educational and workplace environment in which all individuals are treated with respect, dignity, and fairness. We believe that a diverse, inclusive, and safe community enhances learning, teaching, and professional practice. As such, the Academy strictly prohibits any form of discrimination, harassment, or retaliation, whether subtle or overt, and regardless of intent.

This Non-Discrimination and Non-Harassment Policy outlines our obligations and procedures for maintaining an environment free from all forms of bias, harassment, intimidation, and retaliation. It is applicable to all members of the ESSI Academy community, including students, lecturers, administrative staff, management, contractors, visitors, and any individual engaged in Academy-led or affiliated activities.

Scope

This policy applies to all activities conducted by the Academy's, whether on-site, online, or at off-site events; all modes of learning, including in-person, blended, and virtual delivery (when this is authorised); and all interactions and communications among students, staff, and external partners, whether verbal, written, or digital.

This policy also covers conduct both within and outside the classroom, including but not limited to: learning platforms and forums, social media linked to institutional activities, academic projects and placements, and administrative, operational, or professional functions of the Academy.

Protected Characteristics

ESSI Academy prohibits discrimination or harassment on the basis of any of the following protected characteristics, as defined under Maltese law and international human rights frameworks: race, colour, nationality, or ethnic origin; religion, belief, or lack thereof; sex, gender, gender identity, or gender expression; sexual orientation; marital or civil partnership status; age; disability, learning difficulty, or medical condition; pregnancy or parental status; political opinion or affiliation; or any other status protected by applicable legislation.

Prohibited Conduct

ESSI Academy maintains a zero-tolerance policy for the following types of conduct:

Discrimination: Unfavourable or unfair treatment of individuals based on a protected characteristic, including the denial of opportunities, resources, services, or access.

Harassment: Any unwelcome behaviour whether verbal, non-verbal, physical, or visual, that offends, intimidates, demeans, or creates a hostile or threatening environment. Examples may include derogatory comments or slurs, bullying or humiliation, inappropriate jokes or gestures, visual displays (e.g., posters, cartoons, memes) that reinforce stereotypes, and persistent unwelcome contact or attention.

Sexual Harassment: A form of harassment that includes unwanted sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature.

Retaliation: Any adverse action taken against a person who, in good faith, reports discrimination or harassment, participates in an investigation, or exercises their rights under this policy.

Reporting Procedures

Any student, staff member, or affiliate who experiences or witnesses discrimination, harassment, or retaliation is encouraged to report the incident promptly. Reports may be made to the Head of Institute or the Director.

Reports can be submitted in person, by email, or by phone. Anonymous reports are accepted and will be treated seriously, though the Academy's ability to investigate and resolve such reports may be limited by the absence of identifiable information.

Investigation and Resolution

Upon receipt of a report, the Academy will initiate a prompt, thorough, and impartial investigation. The process will include gathering relevant documentation or evidence, conducting interviews with the complainant, respondent, and any witnesses, and ensuring all parties are treated with fairness, confidentiality, and dignity.

The outcome of the investigation will be communicated in writing to both the complainant and the respondent, outlining whether the policy was violated, what actions, if any, will be taken to address the situation, and the right to appeal or escalate (if applicable).

Corrective action may include but is not limited to verbal or written warnings, mandatory training or counselling, reassignment or separation of individuals, suspension or expulsion (for students), or termination or disciplinary action (for staff).

Confidentiality and Privacy

All reports and investigations will be handled with utmost confidentiality, respecting the privacy of all individuals involved. Information will be shared strictly on a need-to-know basis to facilitate investigation and resolution.

While complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed (especially in cases requiring formal intervention), all efforts will be made to protect those involved from unnecessary exposure or harm.

Prevention and Education

ESSI Academy recognises that policy enforcement must be supported by preventive education and awareness. To this end, the Academy is committed to providing periodic training on discrimination and harassment awareness for all staff, offering onboarding briefings to new employees and students on this policy to promote inclusivity, tolerance, and mutual respect.

Lecturers are expected to foster respectful classroom environments, and managers are responsible for cultivating professional and inclusive workspaces.

Compliance and Review

The Non-Discrimination and Non-Harassment Policy is reviewed biennially or more frequently as needed to ensure alignment with updates in Maltese legislation or EU directives, MFHEA standards and guidelines, feedback from students and staff, and institutional quality assurance processes.

Any changes to the policy will be communicated to all staff and students and published on the Academy's website and internal platforms.

Disciplinary Action and Sanctions

Violations of this policy may result in disciplinary measures, including formal warnings, probation, suspension, expulsion (for students), or termination (for employees). Disciplinary decisions are made in accordance with the Academy's internal disciplinary procedures and the principles of due process and natural justice.

Non-Retaliation

ESSI Academy maintains a strict non-retaliation policy. Any attempt to intimidate, threaten, or penalise an individual for reporting an incident or cooperating with an investigation is itself a serious violation and will be treated as a separate disciplinary offence.

All individuals are encouraged to speak up without fear of reprisal. Protection against retaliation applies even if the allegation is not substantiated, provided the report was made in good faith.

This policy does not restrict the individual who is subjected to discrimination or harassment to seek redress as permitted by law.