

Policy framework approval by 24th New
Council held on 07.10.2023

Policy Framework for Gender Equity and Equality, and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

1. Background

Gender inequality and various forms of violence, particularly sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), have emerged as significant challenges within the Sri Lankan University System. Recognizing these issues, the University Grants Commission (UGC) acknowledges that addressing these deeply rooted disparities and inequities is essential for Sri Lankan universities to truly claim the mantle of academic excellence. These challenges also pose a hindrance to the government's aspiration to position the country as a regional education hub.

To tackle these concerns head-on, the UGC established the UGC Centre for Gender Equity and Equality in October 2015. This initiative is dedicated to fostering socially responsive and gender-sensitive university cultures that prioritize both freedom and security. It endeavors to create an environment where all university students and staff can pursue their academic and professional pursuits devoid of discrimination and oppression.

Furthermore, the UGC has entrusted the direct management of the Centre to the UGC Standing Committee for Gender Equity and Equality (GEE). This underscores the UGC's commitment to actively addressing these critical issues and driving positive change within the Sri Lankan University System.

The management structure of GEE is shown in **Figure 1**

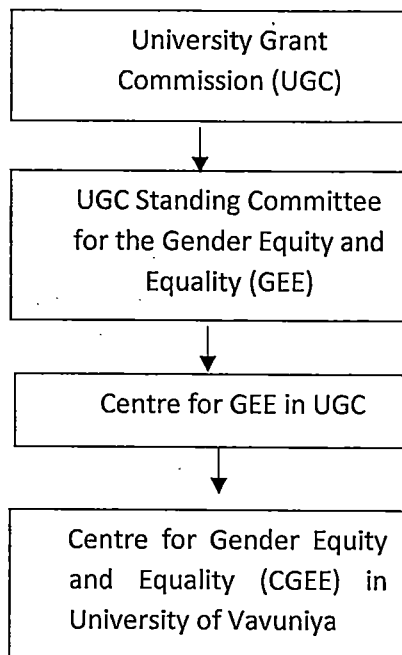


Figure 1: Management Hierarchy of GEE
University of Vavuniya, Sri Lanka

2. Commitment of the University of Vavuniya

The University is unwavering in its commitment to Gender Equity and Equality (GEE) among both students and staff. It stands resolute in its mission to empower women and foster an environment that

is entirely devoid of discrimination and harassment. The responsibility for ensuring that the University remains free from gender inequality and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) rests upon the entire University Community.

The University is wholeheartedly dedicated to promoting gender equality, eradicating unlawful discrimination and harassment, and cultivating an inclusive working, learning, and social milieu. It places a high premium on upholding the rights and dignity of all its staff and students to enable them to realize their full potential. The University is committed to dismantling any barriers to GEE that might otherwise deter individuals of the highest capability from becoming part of our academic community.

3. Policy Framework

This policy framework has been crafted to guide the university in its mission to ensure Gender Equity and Equality (GEE) across all student and staff activities. It encompasses objectives such as promoting equitable participation, ensuring appropriate gender representation in decision-making processes, and preventing Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV).

Definitions

Sexual Violence: any form of non-consensual sexual activity or behaviour that is inflicted on an individual, often involving the use of physical force, coercion, threats, or manipulation. It includes acts such as rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, and forced prostitution. Sexual violence can occur in various contexts and can affect people of any gender.

Sexual harassment: a form of harassment or unwelcome behaviour of a sexual nature that creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment for the victim. It typically involves unwanted advances, comments, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal, non-verbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Sexual harassment can occur in various settings, including the workplace, educational institutions, public spaces, and online environments.

Gender-based violence: any harmful action or behaviour that is directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender or perceived gender roles. It is a form of violence rooted in the unequal power dynamics between genders, and it disproportionately affects women and girls, although men and boys can also be victims.

Gender Equity: the principle of being fair to individuals of all genders, especially concerning the allocation of resources, opportunities, and treatment. It involves recognizing and addressing existing disparities and disadvantages that individuals may face based on their gender identity. The aim of gender equity is to ensure that everyone has access to the same opportunities, and that gender-related biases and barriers are eliminated.

Gender Equality: a broader concept that asserts that all individuals, regardless of their gender, should have the same rights, responsibilities, and opportunities in all aspects of life. Gender equality strives for a society where gender-based discrimination and bias are entirely eradicated, and where individuals are treated with equal rights and dignity, irrespective of their gender identity.

Gender Mainstreaming: a strategic approach aimed at integrating gender considerations and promoting gender equality into all aspects of policies, programs, and activities across different sectors and organizations. The goal of gender mainstreaming is to ensure that gender is a fundamental and routine part of decision-making processes, rather than being an isolated or optional consideration.

3.1. Scope of Policy

The Policy shall be the basis for the University to promote GEE in cooperation with the Government, the UGC and society at large.

The Policy shall apply to the entire University Community comprising students and all categories of employees, of visitors and of service providers of any description who are on invitation or have dealings with the University in an official capacity.

The Policy shall also equally apply to off-campus conduct that may have significant adverse implications for any member of the University Community or the University.

3.2. Overarching Policy Statement

Ensuring GEE for all members of our University community is a paramount objective. The University is wholeheartedly dedicated to systematically incorporating gender as a pervasive theme across its core operations and support functions. Our commitment is to guide the next generation toward a future where equal opportunities and equity prevail for every student, staff member, and external user, regardless of gender, when accessing university resources.

In realizing GEE, the University shall endeavour to do everything within its means to preserve the diversity of the University Community. The policy recognizes gender education as a cornerstone of achieving GEE and empowerment of women through a transformative development process.

The University is committed to working with all its stakeholders within and outside the University, following the strategic actions outlined in this document.

This policy provides preventive mechanisms against violating the policy, and anyone violating the policy shall be subject to disciplinary action as stated in the By-laws of University of Vavuniya.

3.3. Policy Vision

To uphold principles of gender equity and equality and to foster a university community free from SGBV.

3.4. Policy Mission

Establishing a harassment-free university environment for all genders by institutionalizing gender equity and equality through well-defined and embraced mechanisms.

The Policy is based on the following principles:

4. Guiding Principles

- Promoting equitable gender participation for deserving individuals in all university activities.
- Affirming gender empowerment as a central pillar for accomplishing policy objectives;
- Ensuring that the implementation of the Policy maintains appropriate levels of transparency, accountability, confidentiality, and sensitivity; and
- Fostering mutual understanding and respect among staff and students to create a SGBV -free environment
- Creating a harassment-free environment that promotes optimal conditions for teaching, learning, and working.

Further, the principle of zero tolerance to SGBV shall be upheld in above all conditions.

5. Specific Guiding Objectives

1. Ensure GEE in decision-making:
 - Achieve and maintain gender equality among the capable students in officially approved university students' bodies.
 - Achieve and maintain gender equality in all university committees as much as possible.
2. Address gender issues in the content of courses:
3. Prevent instances of SGBV at the University:
 - Sensitize the university community on GEE and SGBV and consequences.
 - Create awareness of reporting procedures for victims of SGBV.
 - Provide prompt, effective, consistent and fair guidelines for handling instances of SGBV.
 - Provide disciplinary procedures and vindicate justice for the aggrieved.
 - Implement disciplinary action with immediate effect, as per the by-law.
 - Facilitate adequate security and surveillance in the public/common spaces to prevent SGBV.
 - Facilitate adequate security and surveillance for complainant, witness and victim.
 - Promote research and publication of research findings and recommendations regarding GEE and SGBV.

6. Policy Resolutions

6.1. Organizational Culture

Scope: *Promotion and enforcement of a gender-responsive organizational culture by the University of Vavuniya to eliminate gender inequities in all university activities.*

The University shall

- develop and enforce policy guidelines on the use of gender-inclusive language throughout the university;
- develop and operationalize policy prohibiting the public display of visual aids and materials that are demeaning to men and women;
- organize gender awareness orientation programmes for new members of the university; and
- oversee all textual, audible, and visual communication vigilantly across University platforms to eradicate obscene language and promote gender equality.

6.2. Creation of Awareness

Scope: *Achieving better understanding and appreciation of GEE and prevention of SGBV among the entire University Community.*

The University shall

- conduct workshops on GEE and the nature of SGBV for all staff and students;
- create and support an advocacy group to address issues of GEE and SGBV;

- disseminate the Policy on GEE and by-laws relating to SGBV to all members of staff and students;
- ensure that all staff and students abide by the Policy; and
- sensitize the University Community on the Policy regularly.

6.3. Safety and Security

Scope: *Fostering a secure and inclusive gender-neutral environment within the University, safeguarding the integrity and dignity of every member of the community, and reinforcing safety and security measures.*

The University shall

- strictly follow the policy and regulations to prevent sexual harassment and violence, and gender-based violence;
- establish and rigorously implement guidelines to ensure a safe and secure environment across the university campus. These measures encompass enhanced street and security lighting, the installation of an extensive network of CCTV cameras, strategically positioned security personnel, the provision of night surveillance services, and the availability of emergency hotlines to address critical situations within the university premises.;
- institute concrete mechanisms to deal with SGBV directed against students and staff; and
- strengthen counselling services and allocate adequate resources for the prevention, management, and rehabilitation of survivors of SGBV at the University.

6.4. Curricular and Co-curricular Programmes

Scope: *Enhancing the integration of gender awareness within the formal curriculum and reinforcing its significance within co-curricular activities.*

- develop a comprehensive framework for fostering gender sensitization and addressing gender-related challenges within the formal university curriculum.;
- review and revise all existing curricula to ensure that the new programmes are gender-responsive;
- encourage staff and students to participate in gender-focused co-curricular activities; and

6.5. Capacity Building and Training

Scope: *Strengthening the university community's ability to actively contribute to policy implementation.*

In this context, the University shall

- train all members of the University Community to facilitate policy implementation;
- institute empowerment programmes to protect all members of the university community against SGBV;
- strengthen the counselling services to deal effectively with cases of SGBV; and
- facilitate the university health and well-being centre to recognize and be responsive to the emotional and psychological needs of staff and students.

6.6. Research and Innovation

Scope: *Fostering a gender-sensitive research environment that enhances the university community's comprehension of national development matters and their repercussions on both men's and women's lives.*

In this context, the University shall:

- design and conduct gender-focused research skills training programmes for the staff;
- develop dissemination outlets of international standards for gender-focused research and publications;
- encourage increased operational research leading to evidence-based programming and/or service delivery for the handling of SGBV research agenda;
- facilitate identification of SGBV research capacities/needs and develop an SGBV research agenda; and
- Promote research methodologies and approaches that prioritize the well-being and dignity of survivors of SGBV and contribute to the development of effective mechanisms for eradicating SGBV.

6.7. Women's Participation in Decision Making

Scope: *Urge the University to implement measures aimed at amplifying women's engagement in decision-making concerning recruitment, promotion, and retention, with the overarching goal of redressing gender disparities prevalent across university systems, structures, and all essential facets of the institution's operations.*

In this context, the University shall

- design and implement programmes ensuring equal opportunity and affirmative action;
- design and implement a gender-responsive cross-generational leadership and mentoring programme for young staff in all disciplines;
- develop and implement a human resource management policy that is gender sensitive and responsive; and
- develop a gender-based databank of qualifications, expertise and experience of personnel in university governing bodies such as the Council, Senate and other affiliated bodies.

6.8. Resource Mobilization and Gender Mainstreaming

Scope: *Proactive advocacy for resource mobilization and the implementation of gender budgeting as essential strategies to secure consistent and sustainable budget allocations, facilitating the successful institutionalization of gender mainstreaming as a pervasive consideration within all core activities of the University.*

In this context, the University shall

- develop and implement a resource mobilization strategy for financing the GEE objectives and for preventing SGBV;
- earmark budgetary resources based on a clearly defined allocation of university funding for gender mainstreaming in all core functions of the University; and
- establish a mechanism for financial accountability for resources allocated for gender mainstreaming.

6.9. Staff and Student Welfare

Scope: *Strategically planning and safeguarding the well-being of both staff and students within the University, with the aim of fostering an environment that not only ensures their welfare but also maximizes overall productivity and excellence.*

In this context, the University shall

- Integrate gender considerations into human resource policies;
- formulate and implement a gender-sensitive policy on disability, including accessibility to the university buildings and facilities;
- formulate and implement a policy on pregnant and parenting students and sensitize all relevant staff on the sexual and reproductive rights of students; and
- invest in on-campus childcare facilities for the benefit of parenting staff.

6.10. Creation of the Centre for GEE (CGEE)

A Centre for GEE (CGEE) shall be created to facilitate and monitor the implementation of the GEE Policy. The CGEE shall come under the purview of the Vice Chancellor.

The CGEE shall be created by

- approving the location for the CGEE by the Senate and Council;
- founding the CGEE with adequate space and staff;
- implementing a Resource Mobilization Strategy to enable the CGEE to access resources; and
- appointing the Committee of CGEE that would assess and monitor the progress and evaluate the GEE Programme;

7. The Centre for GEE (CGEE)

The CGEE shall be headed by a Director appointed by the Council as specified in the By-law and shall:

- provide training on gender equity and equality (including social intersections) to establish a core team of gender experts;
- conduct research, review policy, and provide policy inputs at the university level;
- introduce curricular reforms to inculcate the concepts and practices of GEE to develop relevant skills to prevent and respond to SGBV;
- initiate mechanisms to receive complaints on SGBV from the University Community, act on complaints, and make recommendations to the Vice Chancellor as necessary;
- identify ways and means of preventing SGBV in the University and empower staff and students to prevent and respond to SGBV by developing relevant skills;
- consistently enhance its capacity to facilitate and monitor the implementation of the GEE Policy at the institutional level; and
- identify and develop sustainable strategies frequently for the smooth functioning of the CGEE.

8. Committee of CGEE

The Vice Chancellor shall appoint the founding members of the Committee of CGEE with the approval of the Council. All elected and appointed members shall hold office for three years from the appointment date.

The CGEE shall be governed by the Committee of CGEE comprising the following members.

1. Two members (male and female) nominated by the Council from among its appointed members.
2. DR/SAR/AR of Legal Affairs and Documentation Branch of the University of Vavuniya
3. University Medical Officer
4. Two academics (male and female), either retired or in service, from any other State University in Sri Lanka, with a proven scholastic record in gender issues, appointed by the Vice-Chancellor on the recommendation of the Senate
5. Two non-state actors (one male and one female) engaged in gender-related activism appointed by the Vice Chancellor in concurrence with the Council
6. Six representatives (three males and three females) from among the permanent academic staff elected per election procedure approved by the Council
7. Two representatives (one male and one female) from among the administrative staff elected per election procedure approved by the Council
8. Two representatives (one male and one female) from among the permanent non-academic staff elected per election procedure approved by the Council
9. Four representatives (two males and two females) from among the students elected per election procedure approved by the Council for one academic year.
10. A police officer representative from the Children & Women Bureau shall be appointed by the Vice Chancellor, subject to the concurrence of the Council, and in accordance with the recommendation of the Vavuniya Divisional Head (SSP).

The first meeting of the newly formed Committee of CGEE shall be presided over by the Vice Chancellor and convened by the Registrar. The members of the Committee of CGEE at this meeting shall

- (a) select the Director (Chairperson) from among the six elected members of the Academic Staff; and
- (b) elect a Secretary from among the two elected members of the Administrative Staff.

Following this, the appointment of both the Director and the Secretary shall be made by the Council. The Director and Secretary will bear the responsibility for ensuring compliance with the Gender Equity and Equality (GEE) Policy, as well as carrying out the duties outlined in the Policy Framework for GEE and the By-Laws pertaining to SGBV.

The quorum for the meetings of the Committee shall be half of the members.

8.1. Working Committee and Sub-Committees of the CGEE

The Committee of CGEE shall have the Working Committee and the following Sub-Committees comprising members drawn from the relevant bodies of the University, which shall offer expertise and additional support to the CGEE:

1. Resource Mobilization, Education and Evaluation Sub-committee
2. Grievances Sub-committee

The Sub-Committees shall review their progress in implementing GEE Policy annually and submit regular progress reports to the Committee of the CGEE for consideration and forwarding to the Council. The annual progress reports of CGEE shall be published on the University website.

8.1.1. Working Committee

The Working Committee shall comprise:

- Director of CGEE,
- all representatives of the Academic Staff in the Committee of CGEE, and the Secretary of the Committee of CGEE.

The Working Committee shall ensure the smooth functioning of the CGEE and facilitate the sub-committee to perform their roles responsibly.

8.1.2. Resource Mobilization, Education and Evaluation Sub-Committee

The Resource Mobilization, Education and Evaluation Sub-Committee shall comprise:

- a Chairperson who shall be a representative of academic staff in the Committee of CGEE, and
- one representative each from the academic staff of each faculty.
- the member of the administrative staff shall be the Secretary.

Resource Mobilization:

- design mechanisms to create an annual allocation for GEE activities in the annual budget of the university based on the proposal submitted by the CGEE;
- prepare the annual budget estimation for CGEE;
- follow up the financial allocations and proceed with disbursements as per the university financial regulations;
- recommend an affirmative action programme to encourage the participation of staff members, with specific budget allocations to support their multiple roles in society.

Education:

- sensitize the university community about the GEE policy, By-laws relating to SGBV and grievance redressing mechanism by making the same available in the library, offices and online portal;
- disseminate information about the activities of CGEE by displaying relevant materials at important places and circulating the same through proper channels to the university community;
- publish brochures, handbooks and flyers on GEE and SGBV in all three languages;
- train the staff and students on gender-focused research skills;
- develop guidelines to ensure that research processes and innovations integrate gender analysis wherever applicable;
- facilitate dissemination of gender-focused research findings by creating a research forum or an agenda in the existing research conferences in the university;

- conduct awareness programmes for newly enrolled students and recently recruited staff during student orientation and staff induction programmes, respectively;
- steer interactive dialogues in each faculty among staff and students;
- sensitize staff who deal with student welfare and discipline;
- promote the incorporation of GEE and SGBV aspects in the curricula of degree programmes;
- design and implement a gender-responsive cross-generational leadership and mentoring programme for all staff members;
- train volunteer groups of students to raise consciousness on SGBV and redressing grievance mechanisms among their peers;
- encourage registered trade unions, students' unions, clubs, and societies to amend their constitutions according to the GEE policy and By-laws relating to SGBV; and
- organize activities to sensitize proportionate representation in all university bodies.

Evaluation:

- design mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the performance of the CGEE and the University in implementing this policy and the related By-law;
- put in place performance indicators with time frames to measure the progress in the implementation of the above;
- create avenues for receiving views of the university community on the GEE policy and By-law relating to SGBV;
- review the By-law relating to SGBV from time to time, considering the emerging issues and trends highlighted by research findings; and
- monitor the updates in existing policies, By-laws, procedures and templates related to GEE and SGBV.
- sensitize the university community about the GEE policy and grievance redressing.

8.1.3. Grievances Sub- Committee

The Grievances Sub-Committee shall comprise five members from the Committee of CGEE, of whom shall be

- an academic member from the University of Vavuniya,
- one of the academic from other state universities
- One of the non-state actors
- a member from the administrative staff, and
- a member from the non-academic staff.

The Sub-Committee shall be chaired by one of the academic staff members from in the committee of CGEE and the administrative staff member shall be the Secretary.

The Sub-Committee shall

- sensitize the university community about the GEE policy and grievance redressing mechanism by displaying flyers, brochures and handbooks in the library, offices and online portal;

- develop a form to receive written complaints, allegations and reports of SGBV;
- ensure all complaints are addressed with due regard to key principles, including confidentiality, impartiality, objectivity, timeliness, accuracy and thoroughness;
- provide support to the Inquiry Committee on SGBV concerning documentation;
- provide institutional avenues for victims and offenders to meet trained counsellors to deal with the root causes of SGBV issues;
- report the root causes of SGBV and recommend preventive measures to the Vice Chancellor based on the reports from the Counselling Division and trained counsellors; and
- provide statistics of the SGBV incidents to include in the University Annual report.

9. Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability for GEE

9.1. Responsibility for Implementation of GEE

All members of the University Community and all persons associated with the University are responsible for adhering to the GEE Policy. Overall responsibilities concerning the Policy are as follows:

(a) The Council

As the highest governing body of the University, the Council bears the responsibility of ensuring the University's compliance with legal and financial obligations in the pursuit of Gender Equity and Equality (GEE) while eradicating all forms of gender-based discrimination. To fulfil this duty, the Council will be provided with bi-annual progress reports by the Vice-Chancellor concerning the monitoring and execution of the GEE Policy to ensure its effective implementation. The Council will, when required, exercise its responsibilities through the University's management structures.

(b) The Vice Chancellor

The Vice-Chancellor holds the primary responsibility for the effective implementation of the Policy and for ensuring that every staff member is well-informed about their responsibilities, accountability, and training requirements. Additionally, the Vice-Chancellor is entrusted with the task of ensuring that appropriate measures are taken against any staff member or student found to be in violation of the Policy.

Furthermore, the Vice-Chancellor will delegate the responsibility for advancing the Gender Equity and Equality (GEE) agenda and its complete realization to the CGEE. On matters related to GEE and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), the Vice-Chancellor will take necessary actions based on the recommendations provided by the CGEE.

(c) The Registrar

The Registrar plays a key role in ensuring the effective implementation of the policy within the administrative and non-academic staff. This responsibility includes making sure that all staff members are well-informed about their respective responsibilities, accountability, and training requirements. Additionally, the Registrar will be responsible for taking appropriate actions in cases where any staff member is found to be in violation of the Policy.

(d) Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments

The Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments hold the responsibility for the efficient implementation of the Policy within their respective areas of authority. This entails collaborating with the CGEE to promote the Policy, establishing strategic measures and protocols for its implementation, guaranteeing that all staff members are cognizant of their obligations and receive the requisite support and training to fulfil them, and taking appropriate actions against both staff and students who engage in gender-based discrimination.

9.2. Monitoring and Evaluation

Establishing a robust institutional framework for monitoring and evaluation is pivotal to attaining the objectives outlined in the policy. This will be accomplished through the implementation of an effective monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ensure strict adherence to this policy.

10. Institutional and Regulatory Frameworks

Effectively implementing the GEE Policy demands a cohesive and directed institutional framework that can translate its goals, objectives, and strategies into actionable programs across all levels of university operations. The operationalization of the Policy will be carried out through established University bodies, including the Senate and Council, which are responsible for overseeing University policies.

11. Review of the Policy and By-law

The GEE Policy shall be reviewed every five years by the Committee of CGEE.

12. Penalties for Violating the Policy and By-law

The by-law shall specify the penalties for violating the policy.

13. Amendment of the Policy

The CGEE Committee shall have the authority to amend the Policy and shall follow the provisions of the by-law when amending the Policy. Any amendments shall be approved by the Council.

14. Conclusion

This policy framework reaffirms the University's commitment to fostering a campus that champions Gender Equity and Equality and eradicates Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. Through these strategic actions and guiding principles, the University of Vavuniya aims to create an inclusive, safe, and supportive environment where all members of the university community can thrive, regardless of gender. The commitment to GEE and SGBV prevention is a collective responsibility, and the University stands ready to lead by example and partner with all stakeholders to achieve these critical objectives.

Acknowledgement

The Policy Framework for Gender Equity and Equality, University of Vavuniya was prepared based on the Policy Framework for Gender Equity and Equality, other Universities and the UGC in Sri Lanka.