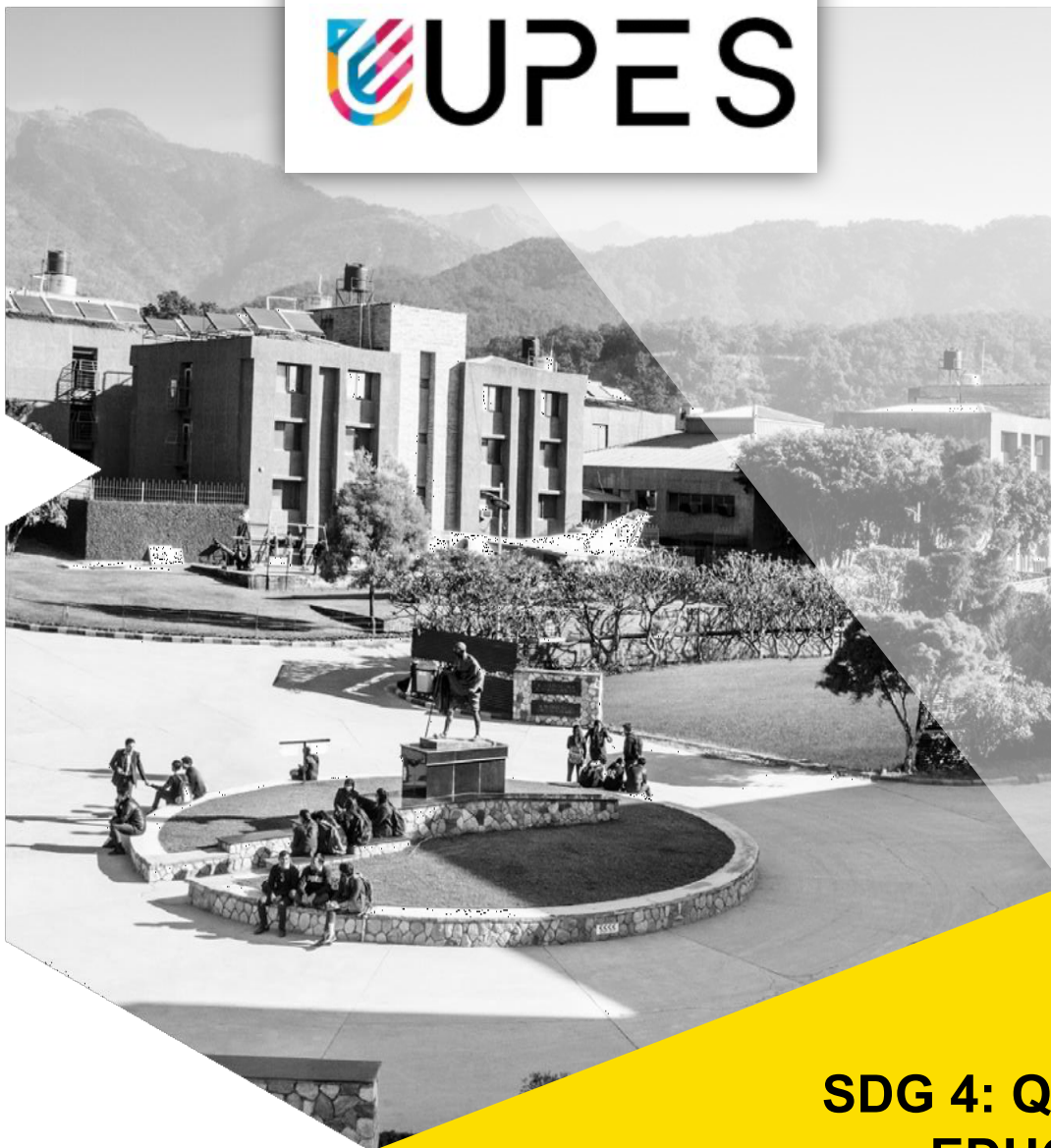




SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



**SDG 4: QUALITY
EDUCATION**

2025

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4.3.5 Does your university as a body have a policy that ensures that access to these activities is accessible to all, regardless of ethnicity, religion, disability or gender?

Formal Non-Discrimination Policies and Equal Opportunity

UPES maintains strong official policies to ensure that all individuals have equal access to university programs and activities regardless of ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, or other traits.

The university's Anti-Discrimination Committee oversees compliance with a broad non-discrimination mandate: **no discrimination is permitted on the basis of gender, race/caste, marital status, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, or disability.**

An Anti-Discrimination Cell has been established to prevent and address any bias, including caste-, creed-, or religion-based discrimination among students [1]. These policies make clear that ****any behavior undermining the “status, dignity and honor” of students belonging to Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, disabled/“handicapped,” or any discriminatory behavior based on gender, race, color, religion, region, or appearance is strictly prohibited and punishable [2].**

In practice, this means UPES enforces a zero-tolerance stance on harassment or exclusion of any community on campus. The university also upholds **gender equity and safety through a dedicated Internal Complaints Committee (ICC)** under the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace Act. UPES is *“committed to providing a safe working and academic environment to all girl students and its women employees,”* and has an official policy and ICC procedure to prevent and redress sexual harassment on campus [3].

Importantly, the principle of equal opportunity is embedded at all levels of the institution:

UPES explicitly commits to providing equal opportunity to all, and it prohibits any decision (whether in student admissions or hiring) from being influenced by an individual's gender, caste, religion, ethnicity/nationality, disability, or any other protected trait [4]. In summary, the university's governing policies and codes of conduct categorically ensure that **access to education, employment, and campus life at UPES is open to all without discrimination**, aligning with global best practices in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Accessible and Inclusive Campus Environment

UPES translates its non-discrimination ethos into an inclusive campus environment, with infrastructure and support services designed for universal accessibility. **Campus facilities are equipped to accommodate students and staff with disabilities**, ensuring physical access through features like wheelchair ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and reserved parking for persons with mobility impairments [5]. Classroom technology and learning resources are also made accessible – for

example, lecture halls are outfitted with assistive tools such as screen reader software and captioning services so that students with visual or hearing impairments can fully participate in classes [5].

In addition, the university provides academic accommodations tailored to individual needs: students with disabilities can receive *extended time on exams, course materials in alternate formats (e.g. Braille or digital text), note-taking assistance, sign-language interpreters*, and other aids as needed to ensure equitable learning outcomes [5]. To coordinate these efforts, UPES has a dedicated **Disability Resource Center (DRC)** – a centralized office that offers information, counseling, and advocacy for students with disabilities [5]. The DRC helps individuals navigate campus resources and arranges necessary accommodations, and it also conducts **workshops and support groups to raise awareness and foster a culture of inclusivity**. Regular sensitivity trainings and awareness campaigns are held for the entire campus community to educate peers and faculty about disability issues, **reduce stigma, and promote empathy and respect** toward persons with disabilities [5].

Faculty and staff are encouraged – and expected – to be proactive in accommodating diverse learning needs and to create *“an inclusive classroom environment that embraces diversity”* [5]. This supportive atmosphere extends to campus culture as well.

UPES celebrates the diversity of its student body, which includes individuals from many ethnic, regional, and national backgrounds. For instance, **all major cultural and religious festivals are celebrated on campus with enthusiasm**, reinforcing respect and unity among students of different faiths. As one student described during Holi celebrations, *“Covered in colors everyone looks the same, everybody is equal,”* noting that *“each festival is celebrated at the campus with great enthusiasm and zest”* with university authorities ensuring it is enjoyable and *“safe for each one of us.”* [6].

The campus also hosts a vibrant international community. UPES attracts faculty and experts from around the world and welcomes exchange students from dozens of countries, bringing global perspectives into the classroom. According to the university’s International Affairs head, having international faculty and diverse cultural representation enriches students’ learning, as *“diversity in a university provides a platform for students to explore the world beyond the immediate environment...an international faculty provides a fresh perspective, enhancing students’ exposure”* [7].

A recent example of promoting cultural inclusivity was the **International Food Festival**, where UPES **hosted over 60 exchange students from 27 different countries in a global culinary fair to celebrate cultural diversity and foster unity on campus** [8]. Students from countries such as Mexico, Bhutan, Ghana, South Sudan, Nepal and many others set up food stalls with traditional dishes, and domestic students joined in to learn about and enjoy each other’s cultures. *“It’s been good fun... We got to taste numerous different flavours in a day,”* said one international student, highlighting the bonding experience with local peers and the sense of community the event created [8]. Likewise, UPES partnered with the *Virasat* heritage festival to involve its youth in preserving India’s diverse arts – over a 15-day festival, students engaged with **rural folk artists and crafts from various Indian cultural traditions**, underscoring the university’s commitment to cultural inclusion beyond the classroom [9].

Through such initiatives – from physical accessibility upgrades to inclusive pedagogy to multicultural events – UPES ensures that its campus is welcoming and accessible to *every* student, regardless of ability, heritage, or religious background. This holistic approach creates a university community where everyone *“can fully participate and contribute to their fullest potential”* in campus life [5].

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Programs

Achieving gender equity is a core priority at UPES, reflected in both policy and practice. The university enforces **strict measures against gender-based discrimination or harassment**, cultivating a safe space for women to learn and work. It has instituted clear rules and sensitization programs to prevent any bias on the basis of gender; as noted in its official SDG Gender Equality report, *"UPES implements strict policies to prevent gender-based discrimination, ensuring a safe and inclusive environment for all students and staff."* [10]

An Internal Complaints Committee (with women representatives from all colleges) monitors women's safety on campus and handles grievances under India's Prevention of Sexual Harassment law [11].

Beyond protection, UPES actively promotes female participation and leadership through dedicated initiatives. Notably, the university launched **"Shakti"** – a comprehensive women's empowerment program. Under the Shakti scholarship scheme, **all female students receive special financial support**: for example, UPES offers a 25% tuition scholarship to *every girl* enrolling, with an additional *33% fee concession for female students from the local Uttarakhand state* [12]. This dual incentive has been a huge boost to aspiring young women who might otherwise lack resources for higher education.

In parallel, the Shakti initiative includes a leadership development program for women staff and faculty: each year a cohort of 30 talented women employees is selected and enrolled in a 9-month training program focusing on professional skills (e.g. emotional intelligence, business communication, management). This program is designed to **foster women leaders** within the institution [12]. UPES's long-term commitment is to ensure that *no career path is off-limits due to gender*.

For the past 17 years, the university's ethos has been to **give all students the tools to craft their careers "irrespective of their gender,"** empowering them to become change-makers in society [12]. The impact of these efforts is evident in the campus culture: women students thrive in fields like engineering and computer science, traditionally male-dominated domains, supported by mentorship and an inclusive academic environment.

There are also active **student-led organizations championing women's empowerment**. For instance, UPES hosts an ACM-W chapter (the women's wing of the Association for Computing Machinery) – the first and most active student chapter on campus dedicated to women in technology. Founded in 2015, **the ACM-W student club provides a platform for female students in computing to develop skills and receive equal opportunities**, working "hand in hand" with male allies to create a conducive environment for all [13]. ACM-W has organized numerous events and workshops – from *"Superwomen"* tech exhibitions to coding competitions – aimed at encouraging more women to excel in STEM. It even hosted the **ACM-W India Regional Celebration of Women in Computing** at UPES in 2018, a two-day national event with activities *curated exclusively for girls* to network, learn technical skills, and meet role models [13]. For its impact, the UPES ACM-W chapter was recognized as runner-up for **Best Student Chapter in India**, reflecting how student initiatives augment the university's gender inclusion mission [13].

Through these combined formal and informal efforts – scholarships, training programs, strict anti-harassment enforcement, and supportive student networks – **UPES strives for true gender equity**, ensuring women have equal access to education and leadership opportunities. This multi-tier approach aligns with SDG5 (Gender Equality) and has been highlighted as a model in promoting women's empowerment in higher education [10] [12].

Cultural and Religious Diversity on Campus

UPES takes pride in the rich cultural tapestry of its campus and actively works to ensure inclusion across all ethnic and religious groups. **Students from all backgrounds are celebrated and their traditions respected**, creating an atmosphere of unity in diversity. A hallmark of this inclusive ethos is the celebration of *all major festivals* and cultural events on campus. Whether it is Diwali, Holi, Eid, Christmas or regional New Year festivals, the university community comes together to observe them with equal enthusiasm. These events are often organized by student clubs in collaboration with the Department of Student Affairs, ensuring representation of India's religious pluralism.

As described in a university blog, during Holi (the Hindu spring festival of colors) students rejoiced on campus after a long COVID gap, and one law student noted that in the Holi gathering **"everyone looks the same, everybody is equal, and strangers readily become friends."** She further praised that *"each festival is celebrated at the campus with great enthusiasm and zest,"* with the university making sure every celebration is joyful and safe for *"each one of us."* [6] This sentiment shows how festival celebrations at UPES are not limited to any one group – instead they serve as opportunities for **interfaith bonding and cultural learning**, where students of different religions participate in each other's festivities.

The university also encourages students to share their own cultures. With a growing number of **international students and exchange scholars** at UPES, the campus has introduced events that showcase global diversity. A recent example is the **International Food Festival** held on campus, which brought together cuisine and culture from around the world. The event featured *over 60 exchange students from 27 different countries* (including nations across Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe) who set up stalls of their national dishes [8]. This food festival was deliberately organized *"to celebrate the cultural diversity on campus and help foster unity through the medium of food."* [8] Students and faculty wandered from stall to stall sampling everything from **Bhutan's Kewa Datshi** to **Ghana's Swahili buns**, **Nepal's Wai Wai Sadeko**, **Mexico's cake "Carlota"** and **Gambia's chicken stew "Chu Yassa,"** all prepared by the students from those countries [8]. The response was tremendous – not only did everyone enjoy a day of global flavors, but friendships were strengthened. *"It was a bonding opportunity with my Indian friends who volunteered to help me,"* shared a Nepali LL.M. student, who felt proud showcasing her culture and seeing people line up for second helpings of Nepali snacks [8]. Faculty organizers noted that the festival provided a *"showcase of culinary excellence"* that promoted cultural unity on campus [8]. In addition to campus events, **UPES engages with the wider community to promote cultural heritage and diversity**. In 2024 the university partnered with a local NGO (REACH) to co-host the **Virasat Heritage Festival** – a famed 15-day celebration of Indian art, folk music, dance, and craft. Through this partnership, UPES opened its state-of-the-art auditoriums and activity centers to host traditional artisans and performers, giving students an immersive exposure to India's *"diverse cultural tapestry,"* from Himalayan folk music to Rajasthani puppetry [9].

Such initiatives not only enrich student life with multicultural experiences, but also reinforce **the values of tolerance, cross-cultural understanding, and respect for all religions and ethnicities**. By integrating cultural diversity into campus life – via festivals, food, arts, and international exchange – UPES ensures that no student is marginalized because of their cultural or religious identity. Instead, diversity is openly celebrated as a strength of the university community.

Student Clubs and Initiatives Promoting Inclusion

At UPES, diversity and inclusion are not just top-down policies – they are also driven by students themselves through various clubs, committees, and initiatives. **Student-led organizations play an active role in making the campus inclusive and vibrant for all.**

Aside from academic clubs, there are numerous student groups focused on social causes, cultural exchange, gender issues, and community service. The aforementioned ACM-W chapter is one example of students championing gender parity in the tech domain [13]. Another key pillar of student life is the Cultural Committee (operating under the Dean of Student Welfare), which is responsible for organizing intra- and inter-university cultural events ranging from dance and music competitions to festival celebrations. This committee ensures representation of different cultures in campus events – for instance, by hosting an annual “*Uurja*” youth festival with performances that span Bollywood music, regional folk dances, and international student talent showcases. These activities provide students of all communities an opportunity to share their heritage and learn from each other in a fun, engaging setting.

Student clubs also take initiative in **outreach programs that support marginalized groups**, often in collaboration with the university’s Career Services and Student Affairs departments. A shining example is the *Joy of Giving* fair organized on campus in October 2021 by the UPES Social Internship Team (a student volunteer body). This was a two-day charity fair timed with Diwali, where **UPES invited local NGOs to set up stalls selling products made by underprivileged groups – including orphaned children, marginalized women, and artisans from disadvantaged communities** [14]. The event essentially turned the university into a marketplace for social good: students and staff came forward enthusiastically to purchase handmade crafts, candles, textiles and other items, with proceeds going back to the vulnerable groups who created them. *“The main motive of this initiative was to help less privileged people and small-scale businesses by promoting their work. UPES gave a wonderful platform to them for showcasing their work,”* explained one student organizer [14]. Alongside the stalls, students conducted a “*best out of waste*” contest and street play (*nukkad natak*) to raise awareness on sustainability and inclusion [14]. The response was overwhelming – the campus community embraced the chance to contribute to social causes, and many students expressed that the experience taught them empathy and the importance of giving back [14]. This student-led fair exemplifies how UPES students proactively work to **include and uplift disadvantaged sections of society**, even from within the campus environment.

Moreover, several UPES student clubs focus on specific social issues and diversity dimensions. For example, the university has chapters of Enactus and NSS (National Service Scheme) through which students volunteer in literacy drives, rural development projects, blood donation camps, and more – often interacting with people of different socio-economic backgrounds and learning to appreciate diversity in society. Even in academic projects, students have shown an inclination towards inclusive innovation. Teams of UPES students regularly participate in hackathons and competitions with ideas aimed at helping people with disabilities or bridging societal gaps (a spirit epitomized by the Sahayak Hackathon described below). Through these myriad club activities and student initiatives, **UPES cultivates a student body that is not only diverse in composition but also deeply committed to the principles of inclusion, equality and social justice.** The enthusiasm of students in celebrating diversity – whether by mentoring girls in STEM, performing a traditional dance from Northeast India at a cultural show, or fundraising for an NGO – significantly amplifies the university’s overall impact in creating an inclusive campus culture.

Inclusive Outreach and Off-Campus Engagement

UPES extends its commitment to inclusion beyond the campus gates through outreach programs and community engagements that ensure **no one is left behind**. A cornerstone of this effort is the **Srijan Social Internship** program – a university-wide initiative that *mandates every first-year student* to work 6–8 weeks with a social sector organization as part of their training [15]. Srijan is carefully designed to inculcate empathy and expose students to the realities of disadvantaged communities. UPES has partnered with over **1,100 NGOs and social enterprises across India**, covering all Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and working with groups ranging from impoverished rural families and urban slum children to differently-abled persons and senior citizens [15]. By immersing students in grassroots projects, **the program helps them understand the challenges faced by underprivileged and marginalized sections** – be it due to poverty, illiteracy, gender inequality, or disability – and encourages them to devise solutions. *“Students witness grassroots realities, better understanding underprivileged communities and marginalisation,”* notes the Srijan overview, which in turn *“enhances their empathy”* and sense of social responsibility [15]. For example, law student Manshi K. interned with a charitable trust (HHFC) in a low-income area and conducted surveys which revealed that *“over 70% of children lacked access to basic education and healthcare.”* This prompted her and her peers to implement education classes for those children, and even create a campus ambassador program to involve more youth in social work [15]. The experience, she says, *“highlighted the importance of connecting with marginalised communities”* and reinforced the value of empathy in her professional journey [15]. In another case, computer science student Vishesh S. worked with **Arushi Society, an NGO dedicated to supporting individuals with disabilities**. He assisted people with daily activities and educational support, and even **converted textbooks into accessible audio formats for visually-impaired students**, while helping out in the therapy sessions for children with Down Syndrome [15]. *“Interacting with [these] students through activities like dance and music, and supporting them academically, was incredibly rewarding,”* he shares, noting that **witnessing their progress “reinforced my commitment to disability rights and inclusion.”** This internship *“deepened my empathy and dedication to advocating for the disabled community,”* inspiring him *“to work towards a society where everyone, regardless of ability, has the opportunity to thrive.”* [15] Such testimonials illustrate how UPES’s off-campus engagements are **deliberately inclusive**, benefitting both the community and the students – the marginalized groups receive support and services, while students gain the perspective and passion to champion inclusion in their future careers. Sessions with United Nations representatives and renowned social activists are also built into Srijan to broaden students’ understanding of issues like gender justice, rural development, and disability rights [15]. By requiring all students to participate in these internships, UPES ensures that **the value of inclusivity is engrained in every graduate**, regardless of their field of study.

UPES also undertakes unique outreach initiatives targeting specific underrepresented groups. A remarkable example is the **“Sahayak Hackathon 1.0”**, which UPES organized in mid-2020. Sahayak Hackathon was **India’s first ever completely virtual hackathon designed for the disabled sections of society** [5]. Spearheaded by the School of Computer Science in collaboration with the student ACM and ACM-W chapters, this pioneering event brought the innovation ecosystem to persons with disabilities rather than the other way around. The hackathon invited participants who themselves were *Persons with Disabilities (PwDs)* – individuals with visual impairments, those on the autism spectrum, people with cerebral palsy, Parkinson’s, hearing impairments, etc. – to come online and collaborate on tech solutions addressing the challenges faced by differently-abled communities [5].

The scale and impact of Sahayak Hackathon were tremendous: the two-day event saw **816 contestants from 110 institutions across 21 states of India, plus teams joining from the USA**, all brainstorming creative assistive technologies and inclusive innovations [5]. Subject-matter experts (including accessibility researchers, sign-language trainers, and disability advocates) mentored the teams on problem statements related to **“Social Inclusion”, assistive education technology, accessible sanitization, and essential services for people with disabilities** [5]. By the end, dozens of novel ideas emerged – and notably, a team from UPES itself won the first runner-up award for their solution [5]. The Sahayak Hackathon exemplifies UPES’s outward-looking approach to inclusion: the university **actively engaged the wider disabled community and empowered them to be creators of solutions**, not just recipients. It also aligned with national inclusion initiatives (such as the government’s *Divyangjan* scheme for persons with disabilities) and involved corporate partners like IBM in recognizing accessibility projects [5]. This event earned widespread praise as a milestone in tech inclusion, and UPES has indicated it will continue such efforts.

Finally, UPES’s off-campus community engagement often focuses on marginalized gender, ethnic, or socio-economic groups to ensure **inclusive participation in education**. The university conducts outreach drives to remote areas (through its *“Gateway to Himalayas”* program and others) to encourage students from rural and tribal communities to pursue higher education, offering career counseling and scholarships in those areas [9]. It also runs free workshops and short-term courses via its CSR initiatives for women and minorities in the region, and partners with government programs for skill development of unemployed youth irrespective of caste or creed. Through the sum of these activities, UPES demonstrates a comprehensive commitment to inclusion – not only within the campus boundaries but in the **wider society that the university serves**. Every policy, program, and outreach at UPES is crafted with the understanding that education and opportunities must be accessible to all, and the evidence – from formal equal-opportunity clauses to vibrant student-driven events – shows that this principle is deeply embedded in the university’s operations and ethos [5].

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