

Equality and Diversity Policy

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1 Purpose

- 1.1 We wholeheartedly support the principles of equality and diversity in employment and are opposed to all forms of unfair or unlawful discrimination. We will treat all job applicants, employees, and service users in the same way, regardless of any protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race (including nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion or philosophical belief, sex or sexual orientation). We aim to make our products and services as accessible and responsive as possible to all existing and potential service users and to provide services to them which recognise and respect their differences.
- 1.2 We recognise that our ability to meet the needs of our service users is improved by having a diverse workforce which generally reflects our client base. We also wish to provide the best opportunities to all our employees, based on their abilities and potential.
- 1.3 We seek to promote equal opportunity in job adverts and recruitment, induction, employment, pay and benefits, training and career development (including promotions), terms and conditions of service, and also when managing any grievance or disciplinary issues. This policy can also apply to relationships with suppliers and contractors, as well as to potential employees.
- 1.4 The responsibility for observing the law and operating this policy lies with the Executive Manage but the policy can only work effectively with the support and commitment of all colleagues.
- 1.5 We believe that everyone has the right to be treated fairly and with dignity and respect at work, and to work without fear of discrimination, bullying or harassment. We welcome diversity amongst our staff, sub-contractors and visitors, recognising that individuals from a wide range of backgrounds and experience can contribute a wealth of experience to achieving our objectives.
- 1.6 We will regularly review this policy to ensure its continuing compliance with relevant employment legislation and the continuing success of its implementation by:
 - ensuring there are no suspected practices in breach of this policy

- ensuring that selection for promotion, training, work allocation etc. is carried out in a non-discriminatory manner
- promoting a harmonious working environment and eliminating discrimination and harassment.

1.7 This policy is not contractual, but aims to set out how we normally deal with such issues. This policy does not form part of any employment contract and its contents are not to be regarded by any person as implied or express terms to any contract made with us. We reserve the right to amend and update this policy at any time.

2 Scope

2.1 This policy applies to all employees, including those on part-time, apprentice, fixed-term and job-share contracts, as well as casual workers and agency staff.

2.2 All employees also have a responsibility to apply good equal opportunity practices across our business. All employees, irrespective of their job or seniority, should familiarise themselves with this policy, and be aware of their responsibility and role in promoting equality of opportunity and not discriminating unfairly or harassing colleagues, job applicants or ex-employees, nor encouraging others to do so or tolerating such behaviour. Employees are also encouraged to challenge any unacceptable behaviour should they either witness it or experience it directly. Disciplinary action, including dismissal, may be taken against any employee found guilty of unfair discrimination, harassment and/or victimisation.

2.3 Employees should be aware that not only are we, as the employer, liable for any cases of discrimination or harassment that occur, but individuals also may be held personally liable for their own acts and behaviour.

2.4 Managers are responsible for ensuring that fair treatment of all individuals is effected within their department and/or section on a day to day basis, with particular reference to recruitment, selection, training and development opportunities and work allocation.

2.5 We will also obtain commitments from other persons or organisations such as consultants, subcontractors or agencies that they will also comply with this policy in their dealings with us and our employees.

3 Definition

3.1 Discrimination is unequal or different treatment which leads to one person being treated more or less favourably than others are, or would be, treated in the same or similar circumstances. It is unlawful if the less favourable treatment is on the grounds of a “protected characteristic” (age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race (including nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion or philosophical belief, sex or sexual orientation).

4 Principles

4.1 Whilst we fully accept our responsibilities under current legislation, we aim to go beyond this and to:

- recognise that everyone has a right to their distinctive and diverse identity
- have a workforce which generally reflects the community we serve
- understand how diversity can improve our ability to deliver better services
- provide services that are responsive to our service user needs
- provide all employees with the necessary training and development they need to contribute to our goals
- provide a supportive, open environment where employees may use their talents fully and where they are treated fairly and with dignity and respect, in an environment free from abuse or offensive behaviour, bullying or harassment, intimidation or prejudice regardless of a protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, marital or civil partnership status, pregnancy or maternity, race (including nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion or philosophical belief, sex or sexual orientation) or additionally, any impairment, responsibility for dependants, social background or any other individual characteristic which may unfairly affect their opportunities in life.

4.2 Furthermore, we recognise the benefits of helping our employees to balance the responsibilities of their work and private lives.

- 4.3 Learning to work with people's differences, visible or not, enables us to work together effectively and helps us to anticipate and meet the needs of all of our service users; to recruit, retain and develop the best people; to fulfil our legal commitments; and to act responsibly in the communities of which we are a part.

5 Actions

5.1 The actions we will take to make this policy work include:

- providing training and communications to raise awareness and understanding of diversity and equal opportunities issues, to show their impact on the business and individuals
- ensuring that decisions on recruitment, access to training and promotion are based on ability only
- regularly reviewing our employment policies to ensure that people are treated fairly, equitably and consistently with their skills and abilities
- developing patterns of work which are consistent with the ability to maintain an appropriate work-life balance
- reviewing working arrangements to ensure that they do not restrict the opportunity for employment or career progression of members of disadvantaged groups
- monitoring the composition of our workforce to provide us with robust data to evaluate the effect of our policies
- routinely monitoring all actions under the grievance and disciplinary procedures by gender, race, disability, age and any other criteria we deem to be appropriate
- providing employees who believe they have been treated in any way contrary to this policy with the opportunity to raise and resolve issues.

6 Types of discrimination

6.1 Direct discrimination

- 6.1.1 This occurs when a person or a policy treats a person less favourably on the grounds of a protected characteristic.

6.2 Indirect discrimination

6.2.1 This is where the application of a policy, criterion or practice (PCP) is such that:

- it is detrimental to a considerably larger proportion of people from the group that the person belongs to
- the employer cannot justify the need for the application of the policy on a neutral basis
- the person to whom the employer is applying it suffers detriment from the application of the policy.

6.3 Discrimination by association

6.3.1 This is discrimination against a person because they associate with someone who possesses a protected characteristic (e.g. discrimination against an employee who is not disabled themselves, but who has a disabled child).

6.4 Discrimination by perception

6.4.1 This is discrimination against a person because the discriminator perceives the person possesses that protected characteristic, even if the perception is incorrect.

6.5 Victimisation

6.5.1 Victimisation occurs when a person is treated less favourably because they have committed or intend to commit a "protected act". "Protected acts" include previous legal proceedings brought against the employer or the perpetrator, or the giving of evidence at a disciplinary or grievance hearing or at tribunal, or making complaints about the perpetrator or the employer or their alleged discriminatory practices.

7 Further guidance on unlawful discrimination

7.1 **Age** – note that this covers both young and older people, and also their perceived age. Age-related bands are still however permitted in the National Minimum Wage bands and when calculating statutory redundancy payments.

7.2 Disability - it is unlawful to treat a disabled person unfavourably because of something 'arising in consequence of their disability'. Reasonable adjustments (see below) must be made if these would enable the disabled person to access any services or the ability to be employed, trained, or promoted to the same extent as a non-disabled person. A disabled person is defined as: *“someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”*.

- “substantial” means neither minor nor trivial
- “long term” means that the effect of the impairment has lasted or is likely to last for at least 12 months (there are special rules covering recurring or fluctuating conditions)
- “normal day-to-day activities” include everyday things like eating, washing, walking and going shopping.

People with progressive conditions, such as HIV, cancer and multiple sclerosis, are covered from the point of diagnosis rather than from the point when the condition has some adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

7.3 Race - this includes colour, nationality and ethnic origin. It is unlawful to treat a person less favourably on grounds of the colour of someone's skin, nationality or ethnic origin.

7.4 Religion or belief – this covers not only any religion, religious belief or similar philosophical belief but also the lack of any religion or belief. A philosophical or political belief is not covered unless it is similar to a religious belief.

7.5 Sex – this covers both men and women. However, in the field of employment, a Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR) can be lawful if a person of a particular gender is specifically required for a job.

7.6 Sexual orientation – this covers any sexual orientation, including homosexual, heterosexual and bisexual.

- 7.7 **Part-time workers** –a part-time worker is defined as someone who is ‘not identifiable as a full-time worker’. Part-time workers are entitled to be treated on the same basis and are entitled to the same benefits, pro-rata, as their full-time colleagues.
- 7.8 **Fixed-term employees** - a ‘fixed-term employee’ is one with a contract of employment which is due to end when a specified date is reached, a specified event does or does not happen or a specified task has been completed. It is unlawful to treat a fixed-term employee less favourably than a comparable permanent employee, unless this is objectively justifiable. The use of successive fixed term contracts for any individual is limited to four years.
- 7.9 **Equal pay** - men and women should receive equal pay for work of equal value where work is the same or rated as equivalent regardless of the hours worked.
- 7.10 **Genuine Occupational Requirement (GOR)** - in very limited circumstances it will be lawful to treat people differently if it is a genuine occupational requirement that the job holder must possess a particular protected characteristic. When deciding if this applies, we will consider the nature of the work and the context in which it is carried out.

8 Reasonable adjustments for disabled individuals

- 8.1 All employers have a duty to consider and make reasonable adjustments to facilitate the employment of a disabled person. These may include:
- making adjustments to premises
 - re-allocating some of a disabled employee’s duties
 - transferring a disabled employee to a role better suited to their ability
 - relocating a disabled employee to a more suitable office or location
 - giving a disabled employee time off work for medical treatment or rehabilitation
 - providing training or mentoring for a disabled employee
 - supplying or modifying equipment, instruction and training manuals for disabled employees.

- 8.2 We will consider and make any other reasonable adjustment to the employment arrangements or our premises if these substantially disadvantage a disabled employee or a disabled applicant. However, a number of factors will be taken into account in deciding if it is reasonable to make any changes. These include:
- the extent to which an alteration will improve the situation for the disabled employee or applicant
 - how easy it is to make the change
 - the cost of the measure, both financially and in terms of the disruption it will cause
 - our resources
 - any financial or other help that may be available.
- 8.3 If an employee has a disability, or becomes disabled during the course of their employment, and feels that any such adjustments are appropriate, they should discuss this with their Line Manager in the first instance.

9 Recruitment and promotion

- 9.1 We will provide full and fair consideration for all job applicants, based on merit and ability. All managers involved in recruitment will be trained appropriately.
- 9.2 Our recruitment and promotion process must result in the selection of the most suitable person for the job, whether this on a full-time, part-time, casual, temporary, seasonal or contract basis. Our focus is on the skills, abilities, qualifications, aptitude and potential of individuals to do their jobs.
- 9.3 We will ensure that our job adverts encourage applications from all suitably qualified and experienced people, through either internal and/or external advertising.

- 9.4 All adverts will be carefully worded to ensure that no intent of either direct or indirect discrimination is interpreted nor is there indication of stereotyping of roles. They will normally state "We are an equal opportunity employer and value diversity" or similar wording.
- 9.5 Job descriptions will properly reflect the responsibilities of the jobholder and person specifications will include only requirements that are necessary and justifiable for the effective performance of the job.
- 9.6 Selection criteria and procedures are intended to ensure that individuals are selected, promoted and treated on the basis of their individual relevant merit, ability and suitability for the post. We recognise that passive policies will not reverse the discrimination experienced by many groups of people. To this end, if certain groups are under-represented within our business we may actively seek to encourage applications from those groups. Shortlisting and interviewing will normally be carried out by more than one person, to minimise the risk of conscious or unconscious bias.
- 9.7 The selection process will be carried out consistently for all jobs at all levels and will be fair and non-discriminatory. Interviews will be undertaken with an unbiased approach towards candidates and only questions which relate to the job and which are non-discriminatory will be asked. Questions about marriage plans; family intentions; religious or political commitments; caring responsibilities; intention to join our pension scheme or to opt out; or about any other issues which may give rise to suspicions of unlawful discrimination should not be asked. Selection tests will be specifically related to the job and measure an individual's actual, or inherent, ability to do or train for the job.
- 9.8 All information provided by applicants will be treated as confidential and their details will be stored and processed in line with the requirements of data protection legislation.

10 Training and development

- 10.1 We are committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in terms of access to training to increase employees' knowledge and skills and to provide them with opportunities to develop their potential.

- 10.2 All employees are encouraged to discuss their career prospects and training needs with their manager on a regular basis. Opportunities for promotion and training will be communicated and made available to everyone on a fair and equal basis.
- 10.3 The provision of training will be reviewed to ensure that part-time workers, shift or remote workers or those returning to work following a break are able to benefit from training.
- 10.4 It is our policy not to unfairly discriminate in the provision of training. No age limits apply for entry to training or development schemes - these are open to all employees.
- 10.5 We will ensure that this aim is implemented through:
- continuous review and updating of training courses and literature
 - ensuring training materials are free from bias and do not discriminate, e.g. by showing minority groups or disabled people in lower skilled roles only
 - ensuring promotion and transfer criteria are justifiable
 - ensuring assessment criteria are clear and unbiased
 - ensuring staff conducting appraisal interviews, salary reviews and bonus reviews are aware of their obligations to carry these out fairly and consistently in line with this policy.
- 10.6 Appropriate training will be provided to enable staff to perform their jobs effectively.

11 Terms and conditions of employment

- 11.1 We will ensure that all our employment policies including compensation, benefits and any other relevant issues associated with terms and conditions of employment, are formulated and applied in such a way as to remove/minimise any discrimination on the grounds of a protected characteristic or indeed any other characteristic unrelated to the performance of the job.

11.2 These will be reviewed regularly to ensure there is no discrimination. Length of service as a qualifying criterion for additional or improved benefits will not exceed five years unless clearly justifiable.

11.3 Employees will not be subjected to any detriment if they wish to join our pension scheme, nor will they be offered any inducement not to do so. This would include refusing promotion or training to someone who decided not to opt-out, or refusing or reducing a pay increase if it would bring the worker within the band of earnings that would make them eligible for auto-enrolment etc.

12 References

12.1 We will not discriminate against individuals who have left our organisation, either by failing to provide references that are based on accurate, factual information or by failing to provide a reference when we would normally do so.

13 Retirement

13.1 We have no fixed retirement age and anyone who wishes to work beyond State Pension Age may choose to do so.

14 Positive action (optional)

14.1 We recognise that passive policies will not reverse the discrimination experienced by many groups of people. To this end, if certain groups are under-represented within our business we may actively seek to encourage applications from those groups.

14.2 The decision as to which applicant is offered a post (either recruitment or promotion) must be based entirely on the merit of the individual. However, where two candidates are equally qualified and suitable in all other respects, we may decide to offer the post to a candidate who is from a group that is under-represented in our workforce at that particular level.

15 HR policies and procedures

15.1 Our HR policies and procedures will be reviewed regularly to improve, amend or adapt current practices to promote equality of opportunity within our business.

16 Complaints procedure

- 16.1 Harassment, discrimination and bullying will not be tolerated. We recognise that making a complaint can be embarrassing and stressful. Sometimes the complainant simply wants the conduct or behaviour to stop and sometimes they want stronger action to be taken and therefore to take account of this we offer various routes of action.
- 16.2 Employees who believe they have been discriminated against should bring this to our attention as soon as possible. In the first instance, they are encouraged to do this informally, but where it has not been possible to resolve this informally, or where the matter is particularly serious, they are advised to use our grievance procedure. An employee who, in good faith, brings a complaint of discrimination must not be victimised or less favourably treated as a result. (However, false allegations that are found to have been made in bad faith will be dealt with under our disciplinary procedure.)
- 16.3 When dealing with general disciplinary matters, care is to be taken that employees or workers who have, are perceived to have, or are associated with someone who has, a protected characteristic, are not dismissed or disciplined for performance or behaviour which could be overlooked or condoned in other employees or workers.
- 16.4 Any individual who feels that he/she has been subjected to bullying, or harassment should refer to our bullying and harassment policy. Equally, anyone who witnesses incidents of bullying or harassment should report this to his/her manager or an appropriate senior member of staff.

17 Responsibilities

17.1 Managers' responsibility

- 17.1.1 As employers, we are liable for the actions of our employees and workers and therefore all our managers, supervisors and team leaders are responsible for the successful implementation of this policy within their own departments and should take steps to ensure that people working for them understand and follow this policy.

17.2 Employees' responsibility

17.2.1 All our employees are required to comply with this policy, together with our associated policies (see below).

17.2.2 Any employee who witnesses behaviour or decisions that seem to be contrary to this policy should challenge these or raise the issue with their Line Manager.

18 Related policies and documents

- Bullying and harassment policy
- Disciplinary policy
- Equal opportunity monitoring form
- Grievance policy
- Recruitment and selection policy
- Training and development policy
- Whistleblowing policy

The above list is not exhaustive.

19 Further information

Any queries or comments about this policy should be addressed to Chief Executive