



Equality & Diversity policy

Introduction

The Network is committed to equality of opportunity and the creation of a diverse workforce.

This document sets out the Network's policy on equality and diversity.

Equality of opportunity means ensuring there is no unlawful discrimination against employees and others at work (including other Network Members), including job applicants.

Diversity means recognising that drawing on a wide pool of talent will make an organisation more effective and enhance public image.

Scope

The policy applies to all employees and other people at work (e.g. trustees, volunteers, members, contractors).

Whilst this policy is non-contractual, employees and others need to be aware that breaches of equality legislation, especially harassment and bullying, may result in disciplinary action. In some circumstances unlawful discrimination may also incur personal legal liability.

Equality & Diversity policy statement

The Network is committed to equality of opportunity, the elimination of unlawful discrimination and the development of a diverse workforce.

In order to fulfil these commitments the Network aims to ensure that:

- Employees (including job applicants and members) and others at work shall not receive less favourable treatment because of the following 'protected characteristics': age; disability; race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; marriage and civil partnership or any other protected characteristic for the purposes of

discrimination legislation. This list includes a 'protected' characteristic that a person may or may not have and/or the person's association with another person with such a characteristic.

- all employees and members have the same opportunity to develop and progress within the Network based on merit and to contribute positively towards its work.
- all employees and members treat their colleagues with respect and are free from harassment, bullying and inappropriate behaviour.
- all managers recognise their responsibilities for treating existing and potential colleagues fairly and are accountable for their actions.
- all employment policies, procedures and practices are free from unlawful discrimination.

This policy will be communicated to employees and members and training provided, as necessary. The policy will be monitored and reviewed to ensure it is working effectively.

Further information

[Guidance Note 1 Legislative background](#)

[Guidance Note 2 Glossary of terms](#)

[Guidance Note 3 Current measures and future aspirations](#)

Business Link www.businesslink.gov.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission www.equalityhumanrights.com

ACAS www.acas.org.uk

Govt. Equalities Office www.equalities.gov.uk

Equality & Diversity guidance note 1

Legislative background

Legislation concerning equality dates back to the 1970s but in April 2010 the Equality Act was passed. This Act draws together 9 pieces of legislation and 100 other measures. The aim is to prevent unlawful discrimination in the workplace and elsewhere. The Equality Act concentrates on several key areas where discrimination may occur. These are known as 'protected characteristics'. With some exceptions the Act protects employees and others at work from unlawful discrimination in the following areas:



Age

The Act covers protection for people of all ages against discrimination. However discrimination on grounds of age may be justified as a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.'

Disability

The Act covers protection from discrimination because of a disability or something arising from a disability.

The definition of a disability is as follows:

'A person is disabled if he or she is a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.'

Under disability discrimination legislation there is a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments to assist a new or existing employee in overcoming a disability in order to do a job.

As part of the measures to protect those with a disability it is no longer permissible, except in very limited circumstances, to ask health-related questions on the employment application form or at interview before a job offer is made.

Candidates invited to interview should be asked if they need any adjustments during the selection process on account of a disability.

Gender reassignment

The Act covers protection from discrimination for transsexuals who propose, start or complete a process to change gender. Absence to undergo medical procedures should be treated in the same way as any other absence for illness and injury.

Marriage and civil partnership

The Act covers protection from discrimination against employees because of their married/civil partnership.

Pregnancy and maternity

The Act covers protection for a woman against discrimination during her pregnancy and statutory maternity leave. In a redundancy situation maternity/adoption returners have priority over comparable employees in certain circumstances.

Race

The Act covers protection for a person from discrimination because of race including colour, nationality, ethnic and national origins.



Religion or belief

The Act covers protection against discrimination because of a religion/belief (or a lack of religion/belief). The word 'belief' means 'any religious or philosophical belief'. It must satisfy certain criteria. Political beliefs are excluded.

Sex

The Act covers protection for both men and women from discrimination because of their sex.

Sexual orientation

The Act covers protection from discrimination because of sexual orientation, including bisexual, gay, heterosexual and lesbian people.

In addition to the above 'protected characteristics' there are other situations where unlawful discrimination can occur.

Part-time and fixed-term status employees

The Act covers protection for part-time employees because of their part time and/or fixed –term status.

Equality & Diversity guidance note 2

Terms used in discrimination

Direct discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favourably than another because of a protected or other characteristic (refer to Guidance Note 1 above).

e.g. a manager does not shortlist a suitable candidate for a job purely because of age, race, sex or other protected characteristic (unless there is an exception).

Associative discrimination

This is direct discrimination against someone because he/she associates with another person who possesses a protected characteristic. The Equality Act has expanded associative discrimination to cover most protected characteristics. It is particularly relevant to disability discrimination.

e.g. A manager refuses a candidate on the grounds he/she has a disabled child and may be absent from work more frequently than other employees.



Perceptive discrimination

This is direct discrimination against someone because he/she is perceived to possess a protected characteristic (even if the perception is incorrect).

e.g. A manager rejects a candidate whom he thinks is from an ethnic minority and might not fit in with other employees. This is not in fact the case.

Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination occurs when an employer imposes a condition, rule, policy or practice which applies to all but disadvantages people who have a protected characteristic. It may be possible to justify indirect discrimination if the employer can show he acted reasonably in the best interests of the organisation i.e. a proportionate means of achieving legitimate aim. The Equality Act expands the concept of indirect discrimination to cover most protected characteristics.

e.g. A manager decides that training sessions to develop employees will take place for the last 2 hours in the working day. A large number of employees are female and work school hours.

This could disadvantage them in comparison to male colleagues.

Harassment

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected/other characteristic which has the effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Harassment now applies to most protected characteristics.

Victimisation

Victimisation occurs when an employee is treated unfavourably because he/she has made a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act. There is no protection for an employee who acts maliciously and raises an unfounded complaint.

Equality & Diversity guidance note 3

Current measures for maintaining equality and future aspirations for achieving diversity in the Network.

4.1 Recruitment and selection



Current measures

Vacancies open to external applicants are advertised on the AWWN website and in other media, as appropriate.

Any qualifications or requirements (e.g. years of service, experience or standards of health) in the job description, person specification and advertisement should be objectively justified.

The employment application form has been reviewed in order to comply with good equality practice.

Candidates are asked in the invitation to interview letter if they need any adjustments during the selection process on account of a disability.

Selection tests are chosen on the basis of their relevance to job requirements and avoidance of unjustifiable bias either in content or scoring mechanism.

Offers of paid employment are made subject to a satisfactory health assessment. The assessment is carried out after an offer is made with the purpose of ensuring the candidate is able to undertake the role safely and without risk to health and of checking if any reasonable adjustments are necessary to assist a candidate with a disability.

Interviewers are encouraged to keep records with reasons for acceptance or rejection of candidates.

4.2 Appraisal, promotion, transfer and training

Current measures

A range of training opportunities is available dependent upon job requirements.

Future aspirations

The appraisal scheme will be examined and regularly monitored to ensure it does not directly or indirectly discriminate against individuals or groups of employees.

Promotion, career development patterns and training opportunities will be monitored to ensure they do not discriminate unlawfully (directly or indirectly) against individuals or groups of employees.

Reasonable adjustments will be made to ensure that employees who might otherwise be disadvantaged on grounds of disability or other factors are provided with the same opportunities.



4.3 Terms and conditions of employment, benefits, facilities and services

Current measures

Flexible working requests are open to all paid members of staff.

Paid employees have equal access to most employee benefits e.g. Healthcare, Peopleline (counselling service), the RSPCA Pension Scheme, Group income protection.

Salary, allowances and annual leave entitlement for part-time employees are calculated on a pro-rata basis to full-time employees.

4.4 Employment policies, procedures, processes and practices

Current measures

The Network monitors its policies, procedures, processes and practices (to include the effectiveness of policies).

Future aspirations

Continuation of monitoring policies, procedures, processes and practices (to include the effectiveness of policies) to ensure compliance.

5. Communication and training

Current measures

This Equality and Diversity policy will be communicated to all employees via the Network's induction documentation.

6. Breach of the Equality and Diversity policy

Current measures

Complaints about breaches of this policy (including allegations of unlawful discrimination) will be handled by the Network's elected Management Committee.

7. Dignity at work

As mentioned above, all employees should have the right to work in an environment which is free from any form of harassment and bullying. Such inappropriate behaviour causes distress to the recipient and others. It can lead to accidents, illness, stress, low productivity and morale and adverse impact on team



By way of explanation the following is an extract from the ACAS Advice leaflet 'Bullying and Harassment- Guidance for Employees'.

'Harassment, in general terms is unwanted conduct affecting the dignity of men and women in the workplace. It may be related to age, sex, race, disability, religion, sexual orientation, nationality or any personal characteristic of the individual, and may be persistent or an isolated incident. The key is that the actions or comments are viewed as demeaning and unacceptable to the recipient.

Bullying may be characterised as offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient.

Bullying or harassment may be by an individual against an individual (perhaps by someone in a position of authority such as a manager or supervisor) or involve groups of people. It may be obvious or it may be insidious. Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual.'

The terms harassment and bullying are used interchangeably by most people. Many definitions include bullying as a form of harassment. In this policy when the words 'harassment' or 'inappropriate behaviour' are used they include harassment and bullying.

An employee who believes that they are the victim of bullying or harassment should contact the Network Manager or Management Committee.

Malicious claims

Malicious, unwarranted complaints of harassment can have a serious and detrimental effect on the other party (the alleged harasser). In such cases the complainant could be evicted from the Network.

Dignity at work principles

Principle 1 - Our organisation will look to adopt a zero tolerance approach towards bullying in the workplace.

Principle 2 - Our organisation will work with Unite to ensure that we have effective policies and procedures for promoting Dignity at Work

Principle 3 - Our organisation will work with Unite to ensure that all who work or volunteer for the organisation are fully aware of Dignity at Work issues.

Principle 4 - Our organisation will work expediently to resolve all cases of bullying, harassment and unacceptable behaviour.



Principle 5 - Our organisation will participate in Unite's research on Dignity at Work.

Principle 6 - Our organisation will participate in Unite's training to support representatives and organisations in dealing with Dignity at Work issues.

Principle 7 - Our organisations will participate in on-going reviews of its Dignity at Work practices.