

Equal Opportunities Policy

Part I: Policy Details

What does this policy cover?

We do not tolerate discrimination or harassment in any part of The Group's operations. We are fully committed to promoting equal opportunities to all our members.

So, this policy covers any and all aspects of our The Group's operations and how we treat all those with whom we engage.

This means that our policy covers, but is not limited to, the following:

1. Your membership
2. Our application for membership acceptance processes
3. How we may train, and commit to the continuing development of our members
4. Our procedures for addressing grievances and disciplinary matters
5. How we terminate membership
6. How visitors, clients and suppliers and other key Group contacts are treated

It also means that we will ensure, as far as possible:

1. full access to everyone applying for membership of our group, and
2. that all relevant decisions are made on the basis of objective criteria.

You should familiarise yourself with this policy and all The Group's other policies.

Who does it apply to?

All members, officers, contractors and volunteers.

What is discrimination?

Under UK law, there are a number of characteristics relevant to an individual who is covered by the policy that must not unfairly be considered (if accounted for at all) in decisions relating to any aspect of their life.

These characteristics are called 'protected characteristics' and they are listed immediately below:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender reassignment
4. Marital or civil partnership status
5. Pregnancy or maternity
6. Race (which includes colour and ethnic/national origin)
7. Religion or belief

8. Sex
9. Sexual orientation

If application-related decisions are made about an individual on the basis (whether wholly or partially), of any of these protected characteristics, it is almost inevitable that unlawful discrimination will have taken place.

The sorts of actions that would fall into this category of unlawful and prohibited initiatives, include (but aren't limited to) those set out below. These actions need not be intended or directly committed by someone (indirect responsibility may be sufficient for someone to have unlawfully discriminated) and an omission or failure to do something may be just as culpable as a positive action.

We will not tolerate their practice by anyone within our Group:

1. Direct discrimination

... when someone with a protected characteristic is treated less favourably than somebody else has or would have been in identical circumstances.

An example of this would be where someone auditions for a role and is rejected on grounds of their racial background. Further examples would be where a pregnant employee, or one with young children, is not selected.

2. Indirect discrimination

... when a group of people with one of the protected characteristics is disadvantaged by a provision, criterion or practice that is applied to all members (unless the treatment may be justified for a good reason).

Examples of this would be:

- Insisting, without good reason, that all members must attend all rehearsals (which indirectly discriminates anyone with child-care responsibilities, women in particular)
- Refusing to provide a room for reflection and prayer, which would discriminate against individuals practising certain faiths
- Rejecting for membership or Dismissing a woman because she is pregnant or of child bearing age

3. Harassment

... covers hostile, humiliating, degrading, intimidating or similarly offensive treatment or conditions to which an individual with one or more protected characteristics is subjected. Any such actions deprive an individual of their dignity and violate them. We draw no distinction between actions that may be labelled as 'joking' and not intended to cause offence, and those that may have been more direct and premeditated in their delivery.

So, for example, in line with legal definitions, reflecting general standards of decency, we will regard any of the following as falling within the definition of harassment:

- making lewd comments and/or displaying pornographic material
- calling someone unkind, derogatory or otherwise unwelcome names or nicknames
- making insensitive jokes, whether about someone directly, or the content of which would be evidently offensive to anyone with a protected characteristic
- excluding colleagues and/or making them feel that they have no option but to exclude themselves

4. Victimisation

This has a particular meaning under UK law and it is narrower than an ordinary dictionary definition, covering the situation only where:

- a member has complained of discrimination (or harassment),
 - or has supported a fellow member in making a complaint about these concerns,
- and has then suffered reprisals from others.

5. Other discriminatory actions that are also prohibited

The UK's law also identifies other actions that can be unlawful under the equal opportunities legislation.

Examples of these include:

- Failing to make reasonable adjustments to minimise certain disadvantages suffered by a disabled member.
- Instructing another person (or applying pressure on them) to discriminate
- Knowingly assisting somebody else when they carry out a discriminatory act
- Discriminating against somebody believed to have a protected characteristic, whether or not they actually do, or because they associate with a third party who does.

Part II: Our procedures and approach to this policy

Duties and responsibilities

Overall responsibility for the effective implementation and operation of the policy lies with Sue McLaughlin, our Membership Coordinator. All management committee members are expected to lead by example, and attain and maintain appropriate standards of behaviour within the Group.

Members need to be aware that the breach of these legal obligations alone will mean that any individual can be found personally liable for unlawful discrimination where they have breached this policy and they will face disciplinary action by us and potentially other legal actions. This is because if you breach this policy, you may also make the Group liable for your actions, and both of us may have to pay compensation to anyone who claims against us.

We therefore expect you to take personal responsibility for adhering to this policy's aims and commitments and for promptly and appropriately drawing any breaches of them to our attention.

We always welcome feedback on how we can best promote and ensure equal opportunities throughout name of business. Please let Sue McLaughlin know if you have any ideas or would like to be involved in any of our existing initiatives.

Handling breaches and enforcement

We take all allegations of breach and any breaches that we discover very seriously.

All allegations and/or suspicions of breach will therefore be thoroughly investigated.

If you wish to complain or raise an allegation of breach (or potential breach) under the policy, you should contact Sue McLaughlin as soon as possible. If you want to take formal action, you will need to follow our grievance procedure and read our policy on harassment and bullying.

Anyone raising a concern about matters covered by this policy, who does so in good faith, will have our full support and co-operation in getting to the bottom of what has happened and any appropriate action that needs to follow on from that examination. This will be the case regardless of our conclusions and including where we determine that the allegation was mistakenly made. There will never be any reprisals against those who genuinely have, or consider that they have, valid grounds to bring concerns about discrimination to our attention.

However, complaints made in bad faith, for whatever reason (including where this is an attempt to avoid or to deflect disciplinary action), will be treated as misconduct and may lead to a dismissal from The Group.

We will also take prompt disciplinary action against you if we discover that you have harassed or discriminated against anyone else in breach of this policy. If we conclude that your behaviour amounts to gross misconduct, we will be within our rights to dismiss you from The Group.