

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

Purpose of Policy

This policy relates to equality and diversity in all aspects of our work including employment and recruitment and selection.

Who is covered by this policy?

Employees

Policy

AS is committed to providing a supportive and inclusive culture for:

1. all those who need our services
2. our volunteers
3. our employees and
4. other stakeholders.

We recognise the positive value of diversity, promoting equality and fairness, and challenging discrimination.

We welcome our legal duties not to discriminate as a service provider and an employer and we aim to go beyond the narrow scope of legislative compliance and follow best practice, making equality, fairness and diversity a fundamental part of all our activities.

We recognise employee with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions, and we encourage and harness differences to make our services more relevant and approachable.

We do not discriminate or tolerate discriminatory behaviour on the grounds of race, colour, sex, gender identity (transgender), disability, nationality, national or ethnic origin, religious belief and or political opinion, philosophical belief, marital / partnership or family status, caring responsibilities, sexual orientation, age, social class, educational background, employment status, working pattern, trade union membership or any other factor.

Meeting clients' needs

We aim to ensure that the services we provide are accessible to all. We will take into account, in particular, the needs of clients with a disability, whether physical or mental; including those who are deaf or have a hearing impairment or use BLS. We will also support clients who require translation services.

General statement

As an employer AS will treat all employees and job applicants equally and fairly and not unlawfully discriminate against them. This will, for example, include arrangements for recruitment and selection, terms and conditions of employment, access to training opportunities, grievance and disciplinary processes, selections for redundancy, references and any other employment related activities.

Recruitment and selection

We recognise the benefits of having a diverse workforce and will take steps to ensure:

1. we endeavour to recruit from the widest pool of qualified candidates practicable
2. employment opportunities are open and accessible to all on the basis of their individual qualities and personal merit
3. where appropriate, positive action measures are taken to attract applicants from all sections of society and especially from those underrepresented in the workforce
4. selection criteria and processes do not unlawfully discriminate
5. where appropriate and necessary lawful exemption (genuine occupation requirements) will be used to recruit suitable employee to meet the special needs of particular groups
6. any third parties acting for AS in respect of employment are made aware of the requirements not to discriminate and to act accordingly.

Training and development

We will ensure that all employees are encouraged to achieve their full potential. Selection for all training and career development opportunities will be purely on the basis of merit. Appraisals of performance will be conducted objectively.

Meeting individual needs

AS will do its utmost to meet the needs of individuals at work, for example:

1. Recognising caring and domestic responsibilities.
2. Working patterns - wherever possible training courses and meetings will be planned to allow attendance by employee working non-standard hours / working patterns.
3. Disability – reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to remove barriers and enable disabled employee to carry out their roles.
4. Religious practices – time off and suitable facilities for prayer will be provided wherever possible. Requests for annual leave to celebrate religious festivals will be accommodated wherever possible.

Implementing the policy

The Director is responsible for implementing this equality and diversity policy in AS.

Responsibilities

All employee, managers, volunteers and trustees will be advised of the existence of an equality and diversity policy as part of their induction.

All employees

At all levels of the organisation employee are expected to have read and understood this policy, to ensure they behave in accordance with its principles and requirements, to encourage the same level of behaviour in colleagues and to immediately report any breaches witnessed, whenever it is reasonable for them to do so.

All managers

Managers are responsible for promoting this policy and ensuring it is understood and complied with by all employee in their area, dealing with breaches and complaints (whether reported or not) seriously, speedily, sensitively and confidentially and contributing ideas for the advancement of diversity principles within the organisation. Managers are expected to be proactive in identifying circumstances in which elements of the policy can benefit individual members of employee and encourage and support employee in making use of such benefits.

Conduct and general standards of behaviour

All staff are expected to conduct themselves in a professional and considerate manner at all times.

The organisation has a separate policy on Dignity at Work which all employees should make themselves conversant with.

AS will not tolerate any unacceptable behaviour such as:

1. making threats
2. physical violence
3. shouting
4. swearing at others
5. persistent rudeness
6. isolating, ignoring or refusing to work with certain employee
7. telling offensive jokes or name calling
8. displaying offensive material such as pornography or sexist / racist cartoons, or the distribution of such material via email / text message or any other format.
9. any other forms of harassment or victimisation.

The above behaviours are considered disciplinary offences and can lead to disciplinary action being taken.

AS does, however, encourage employee to resolve misunderstandings and problems informally wherever possible, depending on the circumstances. However, whether dealt with informally or formally, it is important for employee who may have caused offence to understand that it is no defence to say that they did not intend to do so, or to blame individuals for being oversensitive. It is the impact of the behaviour, rather than the intent, that counts, and that should shape the solution found both to the immediate problem and to preventing further similar problems in the future.

Complaints of discrimination

AS will treat seriously all complaints of unlawful discrimination on any unlawful grounds made by employees, volunteers, clients or other third parties and will take action where appropriate.

All complaints will be investigated in accordance with the organisation's grievance, dignity at work and or disciplinary procedure, as appropriate and the complainant will be informed of the outcome in line with these procedures.

We will also monitor the number and outcomes of complaints of discrimination made by employee, volunteers, clients and other third parties.

Monitoring

We are registered with the Equality Commission for the purposes of the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998. As such we are obliged to monitor the community background and sex of our job applicants and workforce. We are also obliged to review the composition of our workforce and our employment policies and practices every three years and, where appropriate, to consider taking affirmative action to promote fair participation between members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities. We are committed to complying with these duties and will [have] set up suitable arrangements to ensure that we do so.

In addition, we will also monitor and review our job applicants and workforce in relation to the following equality characteristics: e.g. racial group / disability / sexual orientation / age / marital or civil partnership status / dependants or caring responsibilities.

Review

This policy will be reviewed not less than once a year or more regularly if we identify any non-compliance or problem or in the light of emerging legislation or best practice that could impact on this policy.

A report of the findings of the review, based on the data and other information collected and evaluated, will be presented to the trustee board annually, and appropriate action taken.

Compliance and Exceptions

Failure to adhere to this policy could result in breaches of the law, breaches of contract and/or reputational damage to AS and could, therefore, result in disciplinary action through the employee procedures or volunteer problem solving guidance.

If you have any concerns or believe that this policy may be breached, please contact the Director.

Approvals

The final approval level for this policy is the Board of Trustees.