

# Guidance for drafting an Equal Opportunities Policy and Equalities Action Plan

These notes set out the key things you need to think about and decide on when you are drafting a new (see sample policy) or revised Equal Opportunities (EO) Policy. It also provides guidance on putting the policy into action through an Equalities Action Plan, and shows a model Action Plan. Every care has been taken to ensure the information given is accurate and based on current law and best practice. Each of the Policies and Guidance notes are intended for guidance only and are not a substitute for professional advice. The author, Law at Work, Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations or the Big Lottery Fund cannot accept any claims arising from error or misinterpretation. At the foot you will find links to documents and websites that will also be useful.

## Existing policy and procedures

If you currently have a policy or procedures dealing with EO issues, even if they are not written down in a document, it may be that these existing approaches will have to be incorporated into your new written policy. You should take professional advice about what you need to do if you already have rules and regulations governing EO issues before you plan to implement a new policy.

## Scope of policy and related policies

The sample policy takes a broad, generic approach. It does not set out detailed procedures, nor set out separate arrangements for equalities in employment and equalities in service provision. Your organisation may choose to do so. The sample policy makes reference to a range of other policies and procedures which are based on EO principles, and which put the EO policy into practice (e.g Recruitment and Selection). Also, your organisation may wish to expand it to include Diversity and/or Bullying and Harassment policies. Alternatively you may have separate policies on these and cross-reference them as related policies.

## Service Provision

Equal opportunities and diversity are also essential when considering your service users and you may wish to prepare a separate policy or statement for service provision or include this area within your main policy. An action plan to check that your policy goals are being put into practice is essential to ensure that equality and diversity are really being promoted. Services will need to be reviewed and adapted if necessary in response to the diverse needs of the current and potential users, including consideration of premises, complaints procedures, and publicity and PR including the image of the organisation and making links with other organisations. In addition you should ideally consider your suppliers of goods and services in addition to consultants and trainers, ensuring that they too promote equal opportunities and diversity.

## Letting People Know About The Policy

**Consider how your equal opportunities policy statement is publicised and promoted across the organisation and to stakeholders?**

E.g. through posters, flyers, newsletters, statements on advertisements, the annual report, induction and staff meetings etc



## **Are people provided with additional information?**

E.g. providing documents to read, providing training on rights and responsibilities, keeping committees informed with monitoring reports etc.

## **How else could the equality culture be promoted?**

E.g. by including a specific reference in the mission statement, clearly demonstrating that the policy is endorsed by the Management Committee etc., ensuring that managers have the skills and knowledge to lead on the policy

## **Have you consulted widely?**

E.g. with staff or Management Committee members, perhaps setting up an advisory group – this helps ensure ownership of the policy throughout the organisation. Also consult with similar organisations or umbrella bodies to learn from good practice elsewhere (e.g. disabled people or disabled-led organisations for advice on improving access – physical, attitudinal and access to information).

## **Implementation**

As well as the statement summarising the organisation's commitment to equal opportunities, there should be an action plan clearly setting out how the policy will be implemented and how the plan will be monitored and reviewed. This is crucial to ensure that what has been said is actually put into practice across the organisation. Once you have considered all of the above and have a policy and action plan you are happy with, send the documents to all staff, staff representatives or recognised trade union representatives asking for their comments by a specific date. This is called the consultation process and you should give staff a reasonable amount of time to read the policy and return their comments. Having an end date for this is essential so that implementation of the policy can take place. Take any comments into account when making changes and issue to staff as the final policy, outlining how the consultation process impacted on the final document. If you have a recognised trade union agreement there may be a process of negotiation to go through before a final policy is agreed upon.

## **Training and Development**

Staff and managers should be trained in the application of the EO policy as necessary. You may also wish to organise training and workshops in equalities and diversity issues to help raise awareness and build a culture of inclusion and respect. It is also relevant that existing staff promoted into management positions should have their training needs assessed.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

Set a date to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy, perhaps annually, and nominate a person to take responsibility for this. Changes to the policy may also be required by changes in legislation and new case law.

## **Developing an Action Plan**

The action plan should go into detail about what will be done, by when and by whom.

It will cover the specifics of what is expected from management, employees and prospective employees in all aspects of their work.



It may say how harassment and bullying will be tackled although many organisations have a separate policy to cover this.

It will set targets for increased diversity or better practice and may consider positive action measures.

However it will not include quotas that must be achieved by any means – these are unlawful.

It will set specific dates for the monitoring and review processes, and for any training and guidance required.

It should cover all aspects of how the organisation operates such as:

the Management Committee including membership and induction;

Human Resources including the recruitment procedure, induction, training, anti-bullying and harassment policies, volunteers.

**Model Action Plan** This is a suggested action plan to help ensure the implementation of your organisation's Equal Opportunities Policy.

You should consider having a separate action plan to tackle certain areas of potential discrimination such as race or disability, particularly if you have identified that certain groups are under-represented in the organisation.

## **First Step: Audit your organisation**

### **What is the audit?**

The audit is a useful way of establishing where your organisation is with regard to equal opportunities and diversity issues. It will help you build a picture of the organisation's current practice, identify the main issues and priorities for action and provide the starting point from which you can measure your progress in the future.

### **Who will undertake the audit?**

It needs to be an individual or a team with the necessary expertise and skills, such as having:

- a thorough understanding of equal opportunities and diversity issues,
  - knowledge of the voluntary sector,
  - experience of how such organisations operate at all levels,
  - experience of policies and procedures,
  - knowledge of good practice in these areas,
  - excellent communication skills.
- They need to be provided with the necessary time and resources.

### **Is everyone aware that the audit is taking place?**

Make sure that everyone is aware of their involvement (such as completing questionnaires or contributing to an advisory or working group) and of the timescale for it.

### **Consider all areas of the organisation.**



## Resources

For more and related information you may find the following websites and resources useful. Click on the underlined words to access the website.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission Site

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/scotland/Pages/EHRCScotland.aspx> provides information and advice for organisations and employees on all aspects of equalities and human rights.

The ACAS site <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1461> has a wealth of information on a range of employment issues. The section on Equality has information on equality law and best practice. <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1363>

Business Link is a government-provided site with lots of useful information on employing people. . <http://tinyurl.com/darno3> They have a section specifically about Equal Opportunities and Diversity <http://tinyurl.com/cc9xqq>

The UK Workforce Hub <http://www.ukworkforcehub.org.uk/> helps third sector organisations make the best of their paid staff, volunteers and trustees through workforce development. It is simple to register as a user, and the section on Human Resources and Employment Practice contains a variety of updates, fact sheets, templates and resources. <http://www.ukworkforcehub.org.uk/hr>

If you would like more help or advice in relation to this guide please get in touch with us:

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