



EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

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Version	Date	Author	Details/ Changes
1	October 2018	Karen Smith, HR Manager	New Policy
2	July 2023	Karen Smith, HR Manager	Sections 4.2&7 – updated for changes in staff structure and national office terminology



1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy reflects the Ministries Council (MC) commitment to equal opportunities and details the practical implementation of the policy.
- 1.2 The policy is based on the fundamental principle of the MC that it aims for an environment that is free from all forms of unlawful discrimination and values diversity within the organisation.
- 1.3 Achievement of equality of opportunity will be in the best interests of the organisation as a whole, and individual employees.

2. Definition

- 2.1 The MC is committed to individuals being treated fairly and equally regardless of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. These are defined as 'protected characteristics' in the Equality Act 2010 and are explained in detail in appendix 1.
- 2.2 This means that the decisions and actions we take will consider the dignity and rights of the individual. Equal treatment does not mean that everyone is treated exactly the same; treating people fairly may require different approaches but this does not imply to a lesser standard.
- 2.3 Under the Equality Act 2010 there are exceptions to the law regarding discrimination, entitling an employer to impose particular recruitment requirements in relation to protected characteristics if such requirement is, because of the nature or context of the work, an occupational requirement and is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Where it is proposed that a post should impose a particular requirement in relation to a protected characteristic, prior to recruitment an assessment will be carried out by the HR Manager with advice from the Law Department where necessary to determine whether this is appropriate. All roles will be considered on an individual basis.

3. Purpose and Scope

- 3.1 For the purpose of this policy, the MC's commitment to equal opportunities extends to all those that work for the MC and all job applicants.
- 3.2 The policy covers all aspects of employment (including, employment terms and conditions, pay and benefits, promotion and transfer opportunities, training, recruitment, dismissal and redundancy) and the MC will take all reasonable and practical steps to ensure that, subject to any permitted exceptions in terms of the Equality Act:



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- No-one will receive less favourable treatment because of a protected characteristic; this is called **direct discrimination**.
- People who share certain protected characteristics will not be disadvantaged by the MC's practices, policies or procedures unless this can be shown to be justifiable; this is known as **indirect discrimination**.
- No-one will be subject to unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating their dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual; this is known as **harassment**.
- No-one will be treated unfairly who has in good faith made or supported a complaint about discrimination on the grounds of a protected characteristic; this is known as **victimisation**.
- Additionally, in relation to discrimination arising from disability only:
 - No-one will be treated unfavourably because of something arising in consequence of their disability, not just because of the disability itself.
 - Reasonable adjustments will be made for a disabled job applicant or employee so that no-one is disadvantaged by the MC's workplaces or practices.

4. Responsibilities

4.1 The MC, through the Human Resources (HR) Department will:

- Provide guidance in the application and aspects of equal opportunities for all employees and additional training for those involved in the recruitment and appraisal processes.
- Ensure that all employees understand their responsibilities in relation to discrimination through practical learning, training and positive support.
- Receive and act on equal opportunity statistical reports and take action if required.
- Monitor, evaluate and continually improve policy, practices and procedures to ensure best practice and effectiveness and compliance with relevant legislation. The policies in place which are designed to prevent discrimination include, but are not limited to, recruitment, training and development, and discipline and grievance.

4.2 Ministries Development Manager, Ministries Council has responsibility to:

- Ensure the policy is implemented through departmental practice; promoting the policy out with structured training sessions and familiarising all employees with it.
- Treat complaints of discrimination, harassment or victimisation sensitively and seriously and in accordance with the appropriate policies and procedures.

4.3 Employees have responsibility to:

- Promote inclusion and equality through the way they interact with their colleagues and externally during the course of their work.
- Ensure their actions and behaviours do not amount to discrimination, victimisation or harassment in any way.
- Co-operate with any practices put in place under this policy
- Attend training and awareness sessions on equal opportunities and comply with policy and procedures to assist in the prevention of discrimination.
- Bring to the attention of their Line Manager in the first instance any incident where they believe discrimination has taken place.



5. Breaches

- 5.1 Acts of discrimination committed by employees in the course of their employment (including outside the workplace or on work-related trips or events, including social events) will be viewed seriously and if proven will result in disciplinary action being taken in accordance with the MC Disciplinary Procedure and may be regarded as an act of gross misconduct.
- 5.2 Employees who wish to raise a complaint about discrimination should do so through the MC Grievance Procedure.
- 5.3 Significant breaches of the policy can also be raised through the Whistleblowing Policy.
- 5.4 All complaints of discrimination will be dealt with seriously, timeously and confidentially and the MC aims to ensure that no employee is victimised as a result of exercising their right to raise a complaint or supporting someone that does.

6. Monitoring

The MC is committed to monitoring candidate applications and employee appointments. The results of such monitoring will be reviewed by the Human Resources Department and to take action where appropriate.

7. Review

This policy will be reviewed on a regular basis by HR, The Hub and Faith Action senior managers to ensure adherence to best practice, and any related legislation. If necessary, the policy will be taken to the Faith Action Programme Leadership Team (Ministries Council is the employing body of FAPLT) as part of a consultation process.