



Equal Opportunities

The Employer is committed to the policy of equal treatment of all Employees and applicants. The Employer's aim is to recruit, train, promote and reward on the basis of merit and irrespective of the protected characteristics detailed in the Equality Act 2010 (sex, disability, sexual orientation, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, gender reassignment, age, religion or belief, race, which includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins) or in relation to part time status, trade union membership and political belief or affiliations.

The Employer is therefore committed to providing equality of opportunity for all Employees by:

- Preventing any form of direct or indirect discrimination or victimisation or bullying.
- Promoting a good and harmonious working environment where all individuals are treated with respect and dignity and in which no form of intimidation or harassment from colleagues, customers or clients will be tolerated.
- Fulfilling all legal obligations under relevant legislation and associated Codes of Practice where they apply.

You must be aware of the importance which the Employer attaches to its Equal Opportunities Policy, and must ensure that you do not, by your own actions, behaviour or attitude, directly or indirectly or unintentionally discriminate against any job applicants, Employees, customers or clients. Any act of discrimination will be treated as a disciplinary offence; these will include for example, discrimination in selecting, promoting or training, refusing to work with or for a person because of any of the reasons stated in paragraph one of this policy and harassment of any Employee, customer or client.

Direct Discrimination

Unlawful direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another because of one or more of the protected characteristics set out above. Direct discrimination, for example, can occur where a woman is refused a job, training or promotion because she is pregnant.

Indirect Discrimination

Unlawful indirect discrimination is when a provision, criterion or practice is applied to all people but which, in practice, is such that fewer people in certain groups are able to comply and it cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim. Some practices may look fair but have an unintended discriminatory effect. For example, if the Employer made a GCSE English qualification a requirement as selection criteria. This would have a disproportionate adverse impact on people educated overseas and may not be justified if all that is required for the job is to demonstrate a level of literacy or the ability to communicate with others. The necessary level of literacy can be tested or checked in other ways that are more relevant to the job.

Time off for Religious Observance

The Employer will consider any request made for time off to observe particular religious commitments with sensitivity and respectfully. For example, if you need to be home by a certain time on Friday or Saturday to observe the requirements of your faith, the Employer will review the duties of you to see if it is feasible to accommodate this request. Where possible, such requests will be agreed and time may be taken as unpaid time off or made up at a different time which suits the Employer.

If the work simply cannot be done at another time, then the Employer will be unable to agree to the request as it would mean that the business operation would suffer. The same type of consideration will be given to practising Christians who may not wish to work on Sunday or to refrain from working at Christmas or Easter.

Consideration will also be given to the locations and the timings of meetings and functions. The Employer will treat Employees' beliefs and religion with sensitivity. For example, locations for business meetings will be checked regarding alcohol if one of the people required to attend the meeting follows a doctrine which prevents him or her from attending meetings at such a place. The timing of routine meetings will, as far as possible, not be arranged when Employees who follow a particular religion would be unable to attend due to that religion.

Some religions require their followers to pray at specific times during the day. The Employer will allow time off for quiet prayer which can be taken at times convenient to the business and in a convenient place. This time will be unpaid unless it can be made up at a time which is convenient to the Employer. If you request time off for religious practices, such requests will be treated with sensitivity, and your duties and the impact on the business considered carefully.

If you wish to make a request under this section of the policy, you should talk to your Manager who will discuss your requirements to see if these can be accommodated.

Using Holidays

Sensitive consideration will be given to requests to take holiday (or unpaid leave or flexitime) to observe religious holidays. Wherever possible, the Employer will agree to these requests. However, if the Employer has a legitimate business reason for refusing any request then this will be the outcome as the Employer is permitted to make these decisions based on the need to operate the business effectively. If requests are made with as much notice as possible being given it may be more likely that these can be accommodated and planned for in the business work schedule.

Religious and Cultural Dress

You may wear appropriate religious and cultural dress (for example, clerical collars, head scarves, skullcaps, turbans, burqa, hijab) unless it creates a health and safety risk to them or any other person, or otherwise breaches this policy.

For operational and health and safety reasons, Employees of the Employer may have to be flexible in some circumstances. However, the Employer's policy is to ensure that any such restrictions regarding clothing to be worn in an operational environment are genuine requirements on grounds of operational effectiveness or health and safety.

Where necessary management can give further information and guidance on cultural and religious dress in the workplace.

Reasonable Adjustments due to Disability

If you have a condition that is regarded as a disability, the Employer will be as flexible as possible by discussing any reasonable adjustments with you so that the workplace is comfortable and accommodates your requirements.

This will also include any adjustments to the dress code followed by the Employer. If you would like to discuss any adjustments, you should talk to your Manager in the first instance.

Harassment

Harassment is defined as unwanted conduct which can be physical, verbal or non-verbal that either violates a person's dignity, or creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. The Employer will not tolerate harassment on the grounds detailed in the Equality Act 2010 (gender, gender reassignment, race, which includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, disability, sexual orientation, age, religion or belief. It may be persistent or an isolated incident. It can take many forms, from relatively mild banter to actual physical violence.

You may not always realise that your behaviour constitutes bullying or harassment but you must recognise that what is acceptable to one person may not be acceptable to another.

The Employer has a separate Bullying, Harassment & Stalking Policy.

Procedure for Dealing with a Complaint of Unlawful Discrimination

Complaints about, or reports of, discriminatory behaviour or harassment should be made through the Company Grievance Procedure.

Complaints should be raised as soon as possible so that the matter can be dealt with quickly. The matter should be raised first with the complainant's Manager. If this would cause embarrassment or if the complainant feels it inappropriate, for example if the Manager is the subject of the complaint, then the matter should be raised with another, possibly more senior Manager.

If you experience any discriminatory behaviour from a third party such as customers or clients, you should raise the matter immediately with your Manager or any other Manager present at the place of work. The matter will be treated seriously and the Manager will carry out a full investigation.

Accusation of Unlawful Discrimination

Any accusations of unlawful discrimination will be investigated fully by the Employer. As part of the investigation, you will be given every opportunity to answer the allegation and provide an explanation of your actions.

Once the investigation is complete, if the Employer finds that no unlawful discrimination occurred, no further action will be taken. However, if the Employer decides that your actions amount to unlawful discrimination, you may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including summary dismissal for gross misconduct.

If, after the investigation is complete, it is found that the claim is false or malicious, disciplinary action may be taken against the Employee who raised the complaint.

Equal opportunities practice is constantly developing as social attitudes and legislation changes. The Employer will keep its policies under review and will implement changes where these could improve equality of opportunity.

Victimisation

If you are victimised because you have supported another Employee who has a protected characteristic, that Employee will have the same protection as if he or she had that protected characteristic.

For example, one Employee gives a statement confirming that they witnessed the other Employee being harassed due to his or her race. The witness is then victimised and pressure is brought in an attempt to get him or her to withdraw the statement. The witness will then be protected in the same way as the original Employee who was being harassed.