

**Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting
of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)**
Registered Charity No. 1131894

Equality and Diversity Policy

18 July 2021

Introduction

Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting is committed to the historic Quaker testimony to equality. All are equal before God. We are reminded in Advices and Queries:

“Are you alert to practices here and throughout the world which discriminate against people on the basis of who or what they are or because of their beliefs? Bear witness to the humanity of all people, including those who break society's conventions or its laws. Try to discern new growing points in social and economic life. Seek to understand the causes of injustice, social unrest and fear. Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve?”

We are therefore committed to eliminating discrimination and encouraging diversity amongst our workforce.

The purpose of this policy is to provide equality and fairness for all in our staffing. We will not discriminate against anyone because of:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage or civil partnership
- pregnancy or maternity
- race
- ethnic origin
- colour
- nationality
- national origin
- religion or belief
- sex and sexual orientation.

We actively oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination.

All staff¹, whether part-time, full-time or temporary, paid, or voluntary, will be treated fairly and with respect. Selection for employment, volunteering, promotion, training or any other benefit will be on the basis of aptitude and ability. All staff will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential.

¹ In this document, the terms “employees” and “staff” may also include regular volunteers; see Appendix for definitions; where possible, this document refers to “staff” and “staffing” instead of “employees” and “employment”.

Our Commitment

To create an environment in which individual differences and the contributions of all our staff are recognised and valued.

All staff are entitled to a working environment that promotes dignity and respect for all.

No form of intimidation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated, either by staff or by members and attenders at our Local Meetings.

Training, development and progression opportunities are available to all staff.

Equality in the workplace is good management practice and in line with Quaker principles.

We will review all our staffing practices and procedures to ensure fairness. Breaches of our equality policy will be regarded as misconduct.

This policy is fully supported by the Area Meeting and its Trustees.

The policy will be monitored and reviewed every three years.

Action Plan

We are a small employer, with few and diverse posts, which makes equality monitoring difficult. Nevertheless, we will strive to collect evidence that will enable us to be confident that our staffing practices are fair and non-discriminatory.

Policies and procedures

- We will review our staffing policies and procedures, at Area Meeting and Local Meeting levels, to ensure that they are consistent with this policy.

Training

- We will ensure all staff are familiar with this policy. It will be explained to new staff or volunteers as part of their induction programme.
- We will ensure that all staff have equal and direct access to training, development opportunities and promotion relating to their post, taking positive action where necessary.
- Members and attenders in our Local Meetings will be informed of the policy and its implications.

Harassment and bullying

- We are committed to tackling harassment and bullying.
- We will prepare an anti-harassment and bullying policy.

Targets

- All our staffing policies and procedures will be reviewed and assessed against this policy every three years.
- Where lawful, we will take positive action to improve the diversity of our workforce.

Andrew Meek

Clerk to Trustees, Hertford and Hitchin Quakers

Appendix: definitions and further information

Disability: A disabled person is described in the Equality Act 2010 as one who has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Diversity: Diversity is about recognising, valuing, and taking account of people's different backgrounds, knowledge, skills, and experiences, and encouraging and using those differences to create a productive and effective workforce.

Ethnicity: A strict definition of an ethnic group is a group regarded as a distinct community by virtue of certain essential characteristics - a shared history which distinguishes it from other groups and a cultural tradition of its own. Sikhs and Gypsies are examples. However, it has come to have a broader meaning and the expression 'ethnic monitoring' is used in reference to groups defined by colour, race or national origin as well.

Gender: The word 'gender' is often used in place of the word 'sex' in equality issues. 'Gender' does not appear in legislation (except for 'gender re-assignment' - see below) but 'sex discrimination' and 'gender discrimination' are generally interchangeable. Gender refers to a person's psychological identification, whereas sex refers to their biological development.

Gender Reassignment: Gender reassignment is a personal, social, and sometimes medical, process by which a person's gender presentation (the way they appear to others) is changed. Not all transsexual people undergo medical supervision to change their gender. People who decide to live in the gender opposite to that assigned at birth, but do not undergo any medical procedures, are protected from discrimination under the Equality Act 2010.

Harassment: Behaviour which is unwelcome or unacceptable and which results in the creation of a stressful or intimidating environment for the victim amounts to harassment. It can consist of verbal abuse, racist jokes, insensitive comments, leering, physical contact, unwanted sexual advances, ridicule or isolation.

Occupational Requirements: In very limited circumstances, it will be lawful for employers to specify that job applicants must have, or must not have, a particular protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. This is known as an 'occupational requirement'. The requirement must be:

- crucial to the post, and not just one of several important factors
- relating to the nature of job in question, rather than the nature of the employing organisation
- a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Positive action: The Equality Act allows you to take positive action if you think that employees or job applicants who share a particular protected characteristic suffer a disadvantage connected to that characteristic, or if their participation in an activity is disproportionately low.

The Equality Act 2010 allows you, if you want to, to take a protected characteristic into consideration when deciding who to recruit or promote.

However, you can only do this when you have candidates who are "as qualified as" each other for a particular vacancy. This does not mean they have to have exactly the same qualifications as each other, it means that your selection assessment on a range of criteria rates them as equally capable of doing the job.

You would also need some evidence to show that people with that characteristic face particular difficulties in the workplace or are disproportionately under-represented in your workforce or in the particular job for which there is a vacancy. In these circumstances, you can choose to use the fact that a candidate has a protected characteristic as a 'tie-breaker' when determining which one to appoint. You must not have a policy of automatically treating job applicants who share a protected characteristic more favourably in recruitment and promotion. This means you must always consider the abilities, merits, and qualifications of all of the candidates in each recruitment or promotion exercise. Otherwise, your actions would be unlawful and discriminatory.

Sexual Orientation: Sexual orientation: Whether a person is attracted to people of their own sex, the opposite sex or both sexes. Assumptions and perceptions of a person's sexual orientation are also covered by law.

Transsexual: Transsexual is an adjective used to describe people who have such a powerful sense of discomfort with the sex of their body and subsequent social role - a condition called gender dysphoria - that they undertake a personal, social, and sometimes medical, transition to live in the gender identity of their personal conviction.

Voluntary Worker: Voluntary workers are not paid a wage, because of an exemption under the National Minimum Wage 1998 (section 44). The exemption is designed to allow people who genuinely wish to work for a charity or voluntary organisation without profit to do so without fear of qualifying for the national minimum wage.

Voluntary workers are entitled to core employment rights including the right to:

- A minimum period of holiday (annual leave).
- Minimum length of rest breaks.
- Not work more than 48 hours on average per week or to opt out of this right if they choose.
- Protection against unlawful discrimination.
- Protection for 'whistleblowing' (reporting wrongdoing in the workplace)
The contract you have agreed with your voluntary worker may specify additional rights, in which case these will also apply to your particular arrangement.

Please note that the law does not allow for any middle ground between a 'voluntary worker' who does not receive a wage and an employee who must receive a wage at minimum wage levels or above. If you pay any wage, then it must be at least at Minimum Wage levels.

Volunteer: A volunteer is defined as any individual who willingly gives their time, energy and skills, without payment of wage or salary, for the benefit of both themselves, the Area or Local Meeting, and to the good of the community. For the purposes of this policy, volunteers are people specifically recruited as volunteers, through a process that is open to all, and not restricted to Members and Attenders of the Religious Society of Friends.

Members and Attenders appointed to roles through our Quaker nominations process, and Quakers giving service as part of their Quaker commitment, are not volunteers for the purposes of this policy.

Useful documents

ACAS: Delivering Equality and Diversity (booklet), November 2011

ACAS: The Equality Act 2010 - guidance for employers (booklet)

Document History

This document is based on the Equalities Policy and Plan of Central England Area Quaker Meeting, adapted to the circumstances of Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting. A previous version was presented for adoption by Hertford and Hitchin Area Meeting as a draft policy.

This version was adopted by the Area Meeting on 18 July 2021.