

Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action Equality and Diversity Policy



1 Introduction

OCVA has a wide and diverse population of staff, clients, members, volunteers, learners and Trustees and this very diversity is one of the organisation's greatest strengths. In order to consolidate and build upon this diversity, it is essential that equality of opportunity and the absence of unfair discrimination be at the core of all OCVA's activities.

OCVA recognises the link between equality and quality and will not unfairly discriminate in the recruitment or general treatment of staff, volunteers, clients or members on the basis of:

Disability, ethnic origin, national origin, gender, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, responsibility for dependents, trade union or political activities, or age.

We also recognise that socioeconomic status, caring responsibility, mental health, and other factors (not covered in current law) affect an individual's ability to access work, volunteering and good services.

We aim to create a welcoming environment free from unintentional or intentional discrimination. OCVA recognises that equality of opportunity and good race relations are fundamental components of a civilised society.

The aim of our Equality and Diversity Policy is to ensure that no employee, volunteer, client or learner receives less favourable treatment on the grounds stated above.

Our policy is to establish and maintain a working environment that respects and values each other's differences. We see these differences as an asset to our work, as they improve our ability to meet the needs of the organisations and people we serve.

In the provision of services, we will treat clients fairly and courteously at all times.

We will challenge discrimination and lack of opportunity in our own policies and practices, and will help other organisations and individuals to do the same. We aim to ensure that all staff achieve their full potential.

OCVA has adopted this policy as a means of ensuring that these aims are met and maintained.

2 Objectives of the policy

OCVA is committed to promoting and developing equality of opportunity in all its functions and will seek to do this by:

- 2.1 Ensuring that everyone knows we have an Equality and Diversity policy, and the importance that we attach to it, both to comply with legal requirements, and to practise good, sound management.
- 2.2 Ensuring that all staff and volunteers are aware of their personal duty under current legislation, which prohibits discrimination in the workplace.
- 2.3 Providing equal opportunities in recruitment, promotion, training and development, redundancy and retirement.
- 2.4 Ensuring that applicants for employment and volunteering and candidates for transfer and promotion are selected on the basis of relevant qualifications, skills, attitude and abilities they possess.
- 2.5 Encouraging all staff and volunteers to take advantage of suitable opportunities for training and development.

Responsibility

The Board of Trustees has responsibility for ensuring that OCVA operates within the legal framework for equality and for implementing the policy throughout OCVA. However, each member of the OCVA community is responsible for preventing unfair discrimination which it is within their control to prevent.

The Chief Executive is responsible for keeping the Board informed of all developments in this area and for making appropriate staff aware of any specific responsibilities that relate to their work within OCVA, particularly staff with managerial or supervisory responsibilities and those responsible for developing and implementing policies and procedures.

3 The legal framework

The Equality Act 2010 replaced previous anti-discrimination laws with a single act. It covers nine protected characteristics, which cannot be used as a reason to treat people unfairly. Every person has one or more of the protected characteristics, so the act protects everyone against unfair treatment. The protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

The act prohibits unfair treatment in the workplace (recruitment and employment), when providing goods, facilities and services, when exercising public functions, in the disposal and management of premises, in education and by associations (such as private clubs).

The Equality Act sets out the different ways in which it is unlawful to treat someone, such as direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation and failing to make a reasonable adjustment for a disabled person.

Unlawful discrimination can take the following forms:

Direct discrimination is treating one person less favourably than another in the same or similar circumstances or segregating them from others solely because they are, for example, a lesbian, a gay man, or because they have a disability or illness. Refusing to employ someone who has the required skills because they are deaf or pregnant would constitute such discrimination.

Indirect discrimination occurs where there is a requirement or condition which applies equally to everyone but which, in practice, has an adverse impact on a particular group, and cannot be justified. For example an unnecessary physical or age requirement can discriminate against women or disabled people. Another example would be the setting of language tests, where language skills or fluency are not really needed for a job.

Disability discrimination occurs where an individual is unjustifiably disadvantaged for a reason connected with his or her disability, unless discrimination cannot be avoided by making reasonable adjustment. A person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. An example of discrimination would be failure to recruit a wheelchair user without first considering whether the working arrangements or premises can be easily adapted to suit his or her needs.

Discrimination by association occurs when there is direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.

Perception discrimination occurs when there is direct discrimination against an individual because others think they possess a particular protected characteristic. It applies even if the person does not actually possess that characteristic.

Abuse and/or harassment. Discrimination also covers actions which amount to abuse and/or harassment of people or groups of people because for example they are a member of a national, racial or ethnic minority group, a woman, a lesbian, a gay man, or have a disability or illness.

Victimisation occurs when a person is treated less favourably or is discriminated against because for example he/she has pursued or intends to pursue their rights in respect of alleged discrimination.

Institutional racism (Macpherson Report 1999) is the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture or ethnic origin. It can be seen in the processes or attitudes and behaviour, which amount to discrimination, to unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping that disadvantages minority ethnic people. A **racist incident** is any incident, which is perceived to be racist by the victim, or any other person.

Discrimination in any of the forms stated above is unacceptable, regardless of whether there was any intention to discriminate or not.

3.1 Harassment

OCVA recognises that its staff, clients, members, learners and visitors have the right to a working, learning and social environment free from intimidation caused by harassment.

Harassment occurs when someone's actions or words are unwelcome and violate another person's dignity or create an environment that is intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive. Harassment is unacceptable and, where proven, will be treated as a disciplinary offence. OCVA's Bullying and Harassment policy sets out the procedure for dealing with complaints.

3.2 Health & Safety

OCVA recognises and accepts responsibility as an employer for providing, so far as is reasonably practicable, a safe and healthy environment for its employees, volunteers and visitors. The first point of contact for health and safety issues is David Bates, Health and Safety Officer.

4 Staffing and employment matters

4.1 Job Description and Person Specification

The duties of a job, and the requirements of a person to perform it, will be identified to ensure that the job is fulfilling the needs intended and that the educational qualifications, work experience and personal attributes required are essential to the performance of the job. These should be regularly reviewed to ensure they remain up to date.

4.2 Publicising Vacancies

In selecting the most effective methods for publicising vacancies, managers should carefully consider any under-represented groups and how best to target them, whilst making it clear that the final selection will be solely on the basis

of suitability for the post. In all job advertisements OCVA will include a statement that it aims to be an Equal Opportunities Employer.

4.3 Application Forms

All application forms of OCVA will be continuously reviewed to ensure that they contain only that information which is relevant to the post, volunteer opportunity or course. On receipt of application forms, monitoring information will be removed before short-listing and kept confidential.

4.4 Short-listing

Applicants will be short-listed against the criteria given in the person specification or course requirements, and by no other criteria.

4.5 Selection

All employees involved in recruitment and selection should be fully aware of their responsibilities under OCVA policy and legislation with regard to equal opportunities. Training will incorporate equal opportunity issues. More than one person should be involved in selection, to minimise the possibility of subconscious prejudice or stereotyping.

4.6 Probation, Promotion and Regrading

The procedures for each of these will be regularly reviewed with regard to equal opportunities so that:

- access to them and information about career development are equally available to all employees, *and*
- the criteria and procedures are clearly defined and known to all employees within the relevant category, *and*
- the procedures are operated fairly.

5 Flexible working

OCVA will develop and disseminate policies on work-life balance issues to staff. Subject to operational requirements, OCVA will consider whether the introduction of part-time, term-time, job-sharing and flexitime might improve efficiency, enlarge the potential labour market or improve job opportunities for those with, for example, domestic responsibilities.

6 Grievance and disciplinary and complaints

All acts of discrimination will be treated as a disciplinary offence.

Staff who wish to make a formal complaint will have access to the grievance policy in the Staff Handbook. Clients, learners and volunteers will have access to the complaint procedures.

7 Training and staff development

Training will be provided to ensure that OCVA complies with the relevant legislation. The aim, however, is to go beyond compliance and empower staff

and volunteers to act positively and equitably by creating and maintaining an environment where equality of opportunity is promoted.

8 Provision of services

OCVA regularly monitors the use of its services to ensure that they are accessible to all. Particular attention is given to ensuring that all communications about the services it provides reflect the needs of disadvantaged groups. This includes the language needs of different communities, and special communication needs of people with sensory impairments. Support will be given to those with reading and writing difficulties to ensure they are not unfairly discriminated against. All staff (and volunteers) will be made aware of the disadvantages associated with a range of conditions including mobility impairments, mental health problems, learning disabilities and autism. Reasonable adjustments will be made to facilitate access to our services where required.

8.1 Premises

OCVA will make every effort to ensure that premises (including training venues) used in relation to our work are accessible and inviting to all members of the community.

8.2 Purchasing and sponsorship

OCVA reserves the right not to purchase goods and services or accept sponsorship from agencies whose activities are contrary to the principles outlined in this policy.

8.3 Travel

OCVA recognises that not everyone has access to personal transport, or is able to use it, and will plan our services and activities with this in mind.

8.4 Promotion

OCVA reserves the right not to promote activities or services that are contrary to the principles outlined in this policy.

9 Equality and Diversity and Volunteers

OCVA is committed to providing genuine equality of opportunity within the organisation for volunteers.

By providing interesting and vibrant volunteer roles we hope to enable volunteers at OCVA to enjoy a positive volunteer experience and develop and gain new and useful skills (where appropriate).

This is underpinned by three key guiding principles:

- OCVA is committed to involving volunteers in its existing work, to the creation of new, interesting and vibrant opportunities for volunteer involvement and to the continued development and improvement of its volunteer programme.

- OCVA will ensure that the appropriate organisational structures are in place to support the involvement of volunteers.
- OCVA will ensure that volunteers are properly and appropriately inducted, trained and integrated into the organisational structure and that mechanisms are in place to support them, provide opportunities for development and growth and resolve any problems or difficulties that might arise.

10 OCVA policies and procedures

All other OCVA policies support our total commitment to equality and diversity.

11 Monitoring

The ethnic, gender and age composition of our staff, trustees and volunteers will be monitored at all levels. After monitoring, positive action will be taken to increase diversity.

12 Implementation and monitoring

Monitoring of this policy and its implementation is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees.

All staff, volunteers, trainers, facilitators and consultants contracted to work for OCVA will be required to support our Equality and Diversity Policy. Copies of this policy will be freely available to all of the above, and any other interested party.

OCVA reserves the right to revise and reissue these guidelines to comply with any future legislation.