Our Special Friends
Equal Opportunities Policy

Policy statement

The Charity is an equal opportunity employer and is fully committed to a policy of treating all of its employees and job applicants equally. The Charity will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment and selection, promotion, transfer, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, other terms of employment, discipline, selection for redundancy and dismissal.

The Charity will take all reasonable steps to employ, train and promote employees on the basis of their experience, abilities and qualifications without regard to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins and caste), religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation. In this policy, these are known as the "protected characteristics".

Employees have a duty to co-operate with the Charity to make sure that this policy is effective in ensuring equal opportunities and in preventing discrimination. Action will be taken under the Charity's disciplinary procedure against any employee who is found to have committed an act of improper or unlawful discrimination. Serious breaches of this equal opportunities policy statement will be treated as potential gross misconduct and could render the employee liable to summary dismissal. Employees should bear in mind that they can be held personally liable for any act of unlawful discrimination.

You should draw the attention of your line manager to suspected discriminatory acts or practices. You must not victimise or retaliate against an employee who has made allegations or complaints of discrimination or who has provided information about such discrimination. Such behaviour will be treated as potential gross misconduct in accordance with the Charity's disciplinary procedure. You should support colleagues who suffer such treatment and are making a complaint.

The Charity has a separate dignity at work policy which deals with harassment, bullying and intimidation and sets out how complaints of that type will be dealt with.

Direct discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs when, because of one of the protected characteristics, a job applicant or an employee is treated less favourably than other job applicants or employees are treated or would be treated.

The treatment will still amount to direct discrimination even if it is based on the protected characteristic of a third party with whom the job applicant or employee is associated and not on the job applicant's or employee's own protected characteristic. In addition, it can include cases where it is perceived that a job applicant or an employee has a particular protected characteristic when in fact they do not.

Discrimination after employment is also unlawful if it arises out of and is closely connected to the employment relationship, for example refusing to give a reference or providing an unfavourable reference for a reason related to one of the protected characteristics.

The Charity will take all reasonable steps to eliminate direct discrimination in all aspects of employment.

Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination is treatment that may be equal in the sense that it applies to all job applicants or employees but which is discriminatory in its effect on, for example, one particular sex or racial group.

Indirect discrimination occurs when there is applied to the job applicant or employee a provision, criterion or practice (PCP) which is discriminatory in relation to a protected characteristic of the job applicant's or employee's. A PCP is discriminatory in relation to a protected characteristic of the job applicant's or employee's if:

- it is applied, or would be applied, to persons with whom the job applicant or employee does not share the protected characteristic
- the PCP puts, or would put, persons with whom the job applicant or employee shares the protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage when compared with persons with whom the job applicant or employee does not share it
- it puts, or would put, the job applicant or employee at that disadvantage, and
- it cannot be shown by the Charity to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

The Charity will take all reasonable steps to eliminate indirect discrimination in all aspects of employment.

Victimisation

Victimisation occurs when an employee is subjected to a detriment, such as being denied a training opportunity or a promotion, because they have raised or supported a grievance or complaint of unlawful discrimination, or because they have issued employment tribunal proceedings for unlawful discrimination or they have given evidence in connection with unlawful discrimination proceedings brought by another employee. However, an employee is not protected if they give false evidence or information, or make a false allegation, and they do so in bad faith.

Post-employment victimisation is also unlawful, for example refusing to give a reference or providing an unfavourable reference because the former employee has done one of the protected acts set out above.

The Charity will take all reasonable steps to eliminate victimisation in all aspects of employment.

Recruitment, advertising and selection

The recruitment process will be conducted in such a way as to result in the selection of the most suitable person for the job in terms of relevant experience, abilities and qualifications. The Charity

is committed to applying its equal opportunities policy statement at all stages of recruitment and selection.

Advertisements will aim to positively encourage applications from all suitably qualified and experienced people. When advertising job vacancies, in order to attract applications from all sections of the community, the Charity will, as far as reasonably practicable:

- Ensure advertisements are not confined to those areas or publications which would exclude or disproportionately reduce the numbers of applicants with a particular protected characteristic.
- Avoid setting any unnecessary provisions or criteria which would exclude a higher proportion of applicants with a particular protected characteristic.

Where vacancies may be filled by promotion or transfer, they will be published to all eligible employees in such a way that they do not restrict applications from employees with a particular protected characteristic.

However, where, having regard to the nature and context of the work, having a particular protected characteristic is an occupational requirement and that occupational requirement is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, the Charity will apply that requirement to the job role and this may therefore be specified in the advertisement.

The selection process will be carried out consistently for all jobs at all levels. All applications will be processed in the same way. The staff responsible for short-listing, interviewing and selecting candidates will be clearly informed of the selection criteria and of the need for their consistent application. Person specifications and job descriptions will be limited to those requirements that are necessary for the effective performance of the job. Wherever possible, all applicants will be interviewed by at least two interviewers and all questions asked of the applicants will relate to the requirements of the job. The selection of new staff will be based on the job requirements and the individual's suitability and ability to do, or to train for, the job in question.

With disabled job applicants, the Charity will have regard to its duty to make reasonable adjustments to work provisions, criteria and practices or to physical features of work premises or to provide auxiliary aids or services in order to ensure that the disabled person is not placed at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with persons who are not disabled.

If it is necessary to assess whether personal circumstances will affect the performance of the job (for example, if the job involves unsociable hours or extensive travel), this will be discussed objectively, without detailed questions based on assumptions about any of the protected characteristics.

Access to Work

The Charity encourages all disabled job applicants and employees, and those with physical or mental health conditions, to apply to the government's Access to Work scheme for a grant. An Access to Work grant can pay for practical support to help you either start work or stay in work. How much you may be awarded depends on your circumstances.

To qualify for an Access to Work grant in relation to employment you must:

- have a disability or long-term physical or mental health condition that makes it hard for you to do parts of your job or to get to and from work

- be aged 16 or over
- live and work in England, Scotland or Wales; and
- have a paid job or be about to start or return to one - this also includes an apprenticeship.

If you are awarded a grant, the money can pay for things like special equipment, adaptations to the equipment you use, taxi fares to work if you can't use public transport and a support worker or job coach to help you in the workplace.

You can apply for an Access to Work grant either online (https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work/apply) or by phoning the Access to Work helpline on 0800 121 7479. Once you have applied, an Access to Work advisor will then contact the Charity with your agreement and may also wish to visit you at work to assess your needs.

Access to Work is a government scheme and eligibility is strictly governed by the terms set by the government from time to time. It is also entirely the government's decision as to whether to award you a grant. The Charity has no responsibility or liability for decisions made by the government.

Promotion

Where a promotional system is in operation, it will not be discriminatory and it will be checked from time to time to assess how it is working in practice. When a group of workers who predominantly have a particular protected characteristic appear to be excluded from access to promotion, transfer and training and to other benefits, the promotional system will be reviewed to ensure there is no unlawful discrimination.

Terms of employment, benefits, facilities and services

All terms of employment, benefits, facilities and services will be reviewed from time to time, in order to ensure that there is no unlawful direct or indirect discrimination because of one or more of the protected characteristics.

Equal pay and equality of terms

The Charity is committed to equal pay and equality of terms in employment. It believes its male and female employees should receive equal pay where they are carrying out the same or broadly similar work, work that has been rated as equivalent under a job evaluation study or work that is of equal value. Equal pay for these purposes covers all forms of contractual pay, including salary, non-discretionary bonuses, commission, overtime rates and allowances and pension scheme contributions.

In order to achieve equal pay, the Charity will endeavour to maintain a pay system that is fair and transparent, free from gender bias and based on objective criteria. The Charity may also conduct pay and benefits audits from time to time (including a check of any pay grading structure that may be in operation), consider the findings and take any necessary action to address any pay discrimination or bias.

Where it is legally obliged to do so, the Charity will also prepare and publish an annual gender pay gap report in accordance with statutory requirements from time to time in force.

Reporting complaints

All complaints about unlawful discrimination, inequality of opportunity or unequal pay will be dealt with seriously, confidentially and speedily. The Charity will not ignore or treat lightly grievances or complaints relating to unlawful discrimination, inequality of opportunity or unequal pay raised by employees.

If you wish to make a complaint about unlawful discrimination or inequality of opportunity, you should do so promptly, raising the matter in accordance with the process set out in the Charity's grievance procedure.

If you wish to make a complaint that you are not being paid equally to another employee of the opposite sex for the same or broadly similar work, for work rated as equivalent following a job evaluation study or for work of equal value, you should again promptly raise the matter under the terms of the Charity's grievance procedure.

If your complaint relates to bullying, harassment or intimidation, you should refer to the Charity's dignity at work policy.

Employees who, in good faith, bring a grievance under this policy in relation to a discrimination, equal opportunities or equal pay matter will not be disciplined, dismissed or otherwise suffer any adverse treatment for having done so.

Monitoring equal opportunity

The Charity will regularly monitor the effects of selection decisions and personnel and pay practices and procedures in order to assess whether equal opportunity is being achieved. This will also involve considering any possible indirectly discriminatory effects of its working practices. If changes are required, the Charity will implement them. The Charity will also make reasonable adjustments to its standard working practices to overcome substantial disadvantages caused by disability.

Data Protection

In the implementation of this policy, the Charity may process personal data and/or special category personal data collected in accordance with its GDPR and data protection policy. Data collected from the point at which this policy is invoked will only inform the Charity for the benefit of implementing this policy. All data is held securely and accessed by, and disclosed to, individuals only for the purposes of this policy. Inappropriate access or disclosure of employee data constitutes a data breach and should be reported in accordance with the Charity's GDPR and data protection policy immediately. It may also constitute a disciplinary offence, which will be dealt with under the Charity's disciplinary procedure.

Date of review: 15/11/2023
Date of next review: 15/11/2025
Owner: Bin Johnston
Signed: Bin Johnston
Dated: 15/11/2023