



Compiling an Equality Policy

Equality Matters in Business

Helping to create a more profitable business environment



Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd 's nan Eilean



Scottish Enterprise

What is an Equality Policy?

It is a written policy that covers:

- a company's commitment to equality and diversity in the workplace;
- a company's firm opposition to discrimination and expresses its aim of creating an inclusive and harmonious working environment where diversity is respected;
- benefits the policy brings to the company, its employees and customers.

This policy needs to be regularly reviewed and updated.

Is it a legal requirement?

There is no legal requirement to have an Equality Policy.

Having an Equality Policy demonstrates your intention to comply with the legislation and also makes good business sense for your company. It also:

- demonstrates to employees, job applicants, suppliers and customers that your company is serious about fairness and equality in the workplace;
- assists in the recruitment and retention of employees and become an employer of choice;
- allows your company to compete and tender for public sector contracts;
- provides your company with market intelligence to develop a wider customer base from a range of consumers;
- offers a range of additional business benefits associated with implementing the policy including increase morale, motivation, productivity etc.

What should be included in the policy?

There is no standardised Equality Policy that will meet the needs of all businesses. Each business is different, in terms of size, sector, location, offerings to the market, etc.

Therefore, each policy should be customised to reflect these factors.

The length and detail of the policy required for a small business will be less than that required for a large organisation; **a small business may only need a one page document!**

The Policy

Below are examples of areas needed to be covered in an Equality Policy:

Commitment

An opening statement that outlines the company's commitment to:

- working within the legislation;
- providing opportunities for all employees in the workplace including recruitment, selection, promotion and retention processes;
- treating all employees fairly, whether full-time, part-time, permanent or temporary;
- encouraging, valuing and managing diversity;
- providing a working environment which is free from harassment, bullying and discrimination;
- creating an organisational culture where everyone knows that their contribution is valued.

The policy needs to be publicly supported and endorsed by senior management (including owners and/or Board of Directors, as appropriate) and by the relevant trade union or employee representatives. All employees need to be made aware of the company's commitment to the policy, the content of the policy and their contribution to ensure the policy is upheld.

Legislation

Currently there is legislation offering protection from discrimination in employment practice on the grounds of sex, marriage including civil partnership, gender reassignment, race, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, colour, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation and age. It is also unlawful to discriminate against part-time employees in their conditions of service.

The policy should state that the company will not discriminate on any of these grounds in any of its employment practices or its relationship with its customers.

Recruitment and selection

The policy needs to affirm that the recruitment and selection process is to recruit the best person for the job based on aptitude and ability.

- The policy can describe your commitment to open advertising; training/briefings for staff involved in the recruitment process to ensure that they do not discriminate; making appointments based on objective assessments of the skills, qualities and experience needed to do the job.

Staff retention and development

The policy needs to affirm that staff remain loyal to the company and are able to develop to their full potential.

- The policy can describe your commitment to ensuring that training, development and progression opportunities are available to all staff. You can also refer to any other policies you have that support best employment practice including flexible working, home-working (if appropriate), parental leave policies, etc.

Working environment

The policy needs to affirm that a working environment has been created which is free from bullying and harassment and where all staff understands that their contribution is valued.

- The policy can describe your commitment to ensuring that all employees are aware of what constitutes bullying and harassment; that managers are confident and competent in dealing with bullying and harassment; and that all complaints of bullying or harassment will be taken seriously and investigated speedily and confidentially.

(Some companies have a separate policy on bullying and harassment and the procedures usually mirror the grievance and disciplinary procedures).

Observing the policy

The policy needs to affirm that all employees are familiar with the policy and the implications.

- The policy can describe your commitment to ensuring that all employees, including managers, are aware of the policy and that a breach of the policy will be regarded as misconduct and could lead to disciplinary action.

Putting the policy into action and reviewing it

The aim is to ensure that the policy is being adhered to and is still relevant. A good policy will have an accompanying action plan that outlines the tasks that will need to be undertaken (and by whom and by when). There should be a senior, named person within the company who carries responsibility for ensuring that the policy is adhered to and that progress is measured against the actions and reported on.

Further information

A number of sources of free support and further information are provided below:

ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service)

Provides information, independent advice and training on a range of employment matters including equality. The web site contains up-to-date information on the legislation as well as a sample Equality Policy. www.acas.org.uk

Helpline: 0845 747 4747 or 0845 606 600 for Minicom users.

Business Gateway

The Business Gateway website has a section on equality and diversity. It also has guidance on developing a policy on bullying and harassment. www.bgateway.com

Scottish Enterprise Helpline

The Helpline can provide advice to businesses throughout Scotland on how diversity can enhance their business. www.scottish-enterprise.com

Tel: 0845 607 8787

Email: enquiries@scotent.co.uk

Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR)

BERR has Information and guidance for business advisors, intermediaries and links to relevant legislation. Booklets are also available on line including "Pregnancy and Work: what you need to know as an employer." www.berr.gov.uk

Directgov

Directgov is the official government website for citizens. The employment section contains a sub section on discrimination and workplace rights. www.direct.gov.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

EHRC works to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society. It replaces the three previous equality commissions (Equal Opportunities Commission, Commission for Racial Equality, Disability Rights Commission). Their website covers the equality legislation and has a specific section for employers. www.equalityhumanrights.com

Helpline: 0845 604 5510

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