

Equal Opportunities Policy

1. Scope

- 1.01 This is an overarching policy on equality and diversity that applies across all areas of NOCN Group, including employment, product development, quality assurance, assessment, procurement, customer service, business development, operations, marketing and administration. It applies to all employees, temporary staff, contractors, the board of trustees, visitors, training providers, employers, learners and apprentices.
- 1.02 This policy applies to the advertisement of jobs, recruitment, appointment, provision of benefits, allocation of training, promotion, disciplinary proceedings, dismissal, conditions of work, pay, giving a reference, the provision of goods or services and every other activity and aspect of employment as well as to the learners who access NOCN qualifications.
- 1.03 This policy should be viewed in the context of the Equality Act 2010 and the extent of protection it provides.

1. Purpose

- 1.01 NOCN Group is committed to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. As an educational charity that supports a wide range of people, we aim to champion equality, diversity and inclusion in all we do; not just for our employees, but our centres, their learners and all of our partners. NOCN has been awarded the status of Leader in Diversity, Investors in People Silver and Disability Confident Employer.
- 1.02 This policy is designed to ensure that employees understand what it means to be fair and inclusive and to understand their obligations in employment with NOCN Group. Employees are required to assist the Group to provide a high quality, open and fair service to all of our centres and employers; to ensure equal access for their learners to our assessments, accreditation and qualifications; that they require to reach their potential.
- 1.03 We want to ensure that people with diverse characteristics and backgrounds consider NOCN Group to be their Accreditation, Awarding Organisation, End Point Assessment Organisation and Access Validating Agency of choice. We want everyone who engages with NOCN Group products and services to reach their full potential; in a manner which is respectful and that accepts individual difference.
- 1.04 This policy demonstrates how NOCN Group celebrates and values the diversity of its learners, apprentices and employees. It is intended to provide general guidance and advice to team members, managers, centres, learners, training providers and employers.
- 1.05 We celebrate and value diversity and we are committed to advancing equality of opportunity, regardless of age, disability, gender or gender identity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, social background or family responsibilities. This includes people from socially disadvantaged families as well as from deprived or remote geographical areas.

2. Our aim

2.01 NOCN Group strives to:

- a) Encourage the participation of learners and apprentices of all abilities;
- b) Provide a safe and fair End Point Assessment environment;
- c) Develop qualifications, accreditation and assessments to improve access and widen participation;
- d) Offer support to meet individual employee needs;
- e) Ensure the recruitment process is fair and transparent;
- f) Ensure that our environment is free from discrimination, bullying or harassment.

2.02 We aim to treat everyone equally and ensure that no job applicant, employee, worker or service user is discriminated against on the grounds of a protected characteristic, part time status or trade union activities.

2.03 NOCN Group operates within the legislative framework of the Equality Act 2010. NOCN Group views discrimination against any person on any grounds as a serious disciplinary offence.

2.04 NOCN will not tolerate any forms of discrimination based upon:

- a) Direct discrimination
- b) Indirect discrimination
- c) Associative discrimination
- d) Perceptive discrimination
- e) Harassment
- f) Victimisation

2.05 NOCN will not tolerate any form of discrimination, bullying or harassment including socio-economic status, trade union activity, part time status or the following protected characteristics:

- a) Age
- b) Disability
- c) Gender reassignment
- d) Marriage and civil partnership
- e) Pregnancy and maternity
- f) Race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origin)
- g) Religion or belief
- h) Gender
- i) Sexual orientation

2.06 Breaches of this policy will be regarded as misconduct and will therefore be subject to the Disciplinary policy or other appropriate action.

3. Our commitment

3.01 We are committed to providing equal opportunities to our employees, suppliers, centres, learners, partners and service users in an inclusive manner and encouraging diversity in the workplace.

3.02 We do not tolerate any unlawful or unfair discrimination and anyone found to be acting in a discriminatory manner will face disciplinary action, which could include dismissal. Everyone has

a duty to report unlawful or unfair discriminatory behaviour to a member of management. We actively promote equal opportunities and require everyone to contribute towards achieving this objective.

3.03 We believe that treating people with dignity and respect is an important part of realising equal opportunities and diversity.

4. Access to NOCN Group’s service offer

4.01 NOCN Group will:

- a) Ensure publicity and employer/training provider engagement procedures, will be designed to encourage relationships from all sections of the community and from all levels of ability and will be available in a range of formats upon request;
- b) Ensure that engagement with both employers and training providers is user friendly and avoids unnecessary barriers to access for intended apprentices and learners;
- c) Continue to respond to individual learning/assessment needs and in specific cases, requests for reasonable adjustments. NOCN Group will support and encourage widening participation from under represented, disadvantaged or excluded groups;
- d) Continue to respond to individual learning/assessment needs and in specific cases, requests for reasonable adjustments. NOCN Group will support and encourage widening participation from under represented, disadvantaged or excluded groups;
- e) Make clear our expectations and commitments to equality and diversity in our marketing materials and events;
- f) Collect and analyse equal opportunities data to be used to inform the planning and decision-making process of our assessment and marketing policies.

5. Assessment and Product Development

5.01 NOCN Group is committed to ensuring that assessment environments are welcoming and safe for all. We will continue to develop our relationships with employers, training providers and develop our online materials, to improve access for all learners with learning difficulties and or disabilities, as recognised through the NOCN Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations policy. NOCN Group has a duty to ensure that the integrity of all assessment products and materials, including End Point Assessments, is maintained at all times. At the same time, NOCN Group and its Centres have a duty to ensure individual learners and apprentices have access to qualifications and assessments that are most appropriate for their individual needs. During an assessment or examination, NOCN Group and the Centre are required to take reasonable steps to ensure that learners and apprentices with a disability are not disadvantaged in comparison with a learner or apprentice that does not have a disability, by making reasonable adjustments.

5.02 The Assessment and Product Development teams will ensure that assessments, support material, and delivery methods, are free from bias and avoid stereotyping and discrimination.

5.03 NOCN’s End Point Assessors will encourage apprentices to explore equality and diversity issues where required and in line with apprenticeship standards assessment plans.

6. External Quality Assurance

- 6.01 As part of the external quality assurance process, NOCN Group takes steps to ensure that our products are delivered in a fair and inclusive manner to allow equal opportunities for anyone completing an NOCN Group qualification, accreditation or assessment.
- 6.02 NOCN Group requires our Centres to have several equal opportunities policies and arrangements in place for their learners which are regularly reviewed by our External Quality Assurers. These policies include; Appeals policy for learners, Disability Discrimination policy, Equality and Diversity policy and a policy for learners requiring reasonable adjustments or special consideration. We also require our centres to provide a Contingency Plan that will safeguard the interests of the learners and ensure that they receive continuity in their programme of learning should any unforeseen circumstances arise.
- 6.03 External Quality Assurers will check that the policies a centre has in place are actively applied to their assessment processes. The Centre Agreement and Terms and Conditions signed by each centre, state that they will ensure their policies are regularly reviewed and where necessary, amended in line with changes of legislation or circumstances surrounding the centre so that the policies are consistently fit for purpose. External Quality Assurers will review the documents and practices regularly and if they are found not to comply, and/or be insufficient, corrective actions will be recommended and sanctions will be applied where necessary.

7. Recruitment and selection

- 7.01 Our objective is to recruit the staff best able and qualified to perform the required or anticipated tasks. We will recruit using a variety of methods, for example, on-line job websites, advertisements in local newspapers, Job Centres and elsewhere.
- 7.02 The wording of any advertisements will not place unfair restrictions or requirements on a particular group or request specific qualifications that are not necessary for the effective performance of the job. All applications will be considered on the basis of objective criteria such as qualifications, experience and the ability to do the job.
- 7.03 Person specifications and job descriptions will only state requirements as necessary where they are essential for the job. We will take account of reasonable adjustments that may be required for applicants with disabilities.
- 7.04 NOCN Group recognises the benefits of diversity and may consider taking positive action in the recruitment and selection process from underrepresented groups of people in the workforce.
- 7.05 The selection processes used will measure the suitability of the applicant in terms of the requirements for the position as detailed in the essential and desirable characteristics in the job specification. Selection criteria and procedures will be kept under review to ensure that individuals are selected and promoted on the basis of relevant merits and abilities.
- 7.06 Through appropriate training we will endeavour to ensure that employees who are making recruitment and selection decisions do not discriminate, whether consciously or subconsciously, in making these decisions.
- 7.07 NOCN is a Disability Confident employer formally known as 'Two Ticks'. This means that an applicant qualifies as disabled under the Equality Act 2010 and they meet the minimum criteria

outlined in our job specification, we guarantee them an interview. Diversity data will be captured and monitored with our Equal Opportunities Monitoring form. The data will **not** be provided to the shortlisting panel or used in the selection process in any way. The information will be used for recruitment monitoring and provision of statistical data only. All information supplied will be held securely and confidentially in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

7.08 Bullying harassment and discrimination

7.09 Bullying, harassment or discrimination or any other form of discriminatory behaviour will not be tolerated and will be dealt with accordingly through our Disciplinary Procedure. Please refer to our Dignity at Work policy for further information.

7.10 Safeguarding procedures are in place to ensure that all have a safe and secure environment. NOCN will seek to provide a supportive environment for those who make claims of discrimination or harassment according to this policy.

8. Monitoring and review

8.01 This policy and the implementation arrangements which underpin it will be formally reviewed on an annual basis. This review will consider the views of team members and learners and relevant legislation.

8.02 NOCN Group monitors the profile of its registered learners, apprentices and employed team members by age, gender, disability and ethnicity. Monitoring for learners is undertaken by the Quality Assurance team and, for team members, by the HR team. Data collected for monitoring purposes will be reported to the senior management team in respect of staff data, and annually to the Board of Trustees. The presentation of such information shall observe to NOCN’s legal (Data Protection Act 2018) and contractual responsibilities in respect of individual confidentiality particularly in regard of sensitive data and will not unnecessarily identify individuals.

9. Definitions

9.01 The different types of discrimination are generally defined as follows:

- a) Direct discrimination: where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic.
- b) Indirect discrimination: where a provision, criterion or practice is applied that is to the detriment of people who share a protected characteristic when compared with people who do not, and is not a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- c) Harassment: where there is unwanted conduct in relation to a protected characteristic that has the purpose or effect of violating a person’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, regardless of the intention of the perpetrator.
- d) Associative discrimination: where a person is directly discriminated against because of their association with another person who has a protected characteristic.
- e) Perceptive discrimination: where a person is directly discriminated against or harassed based on a perception that they have a protected characteristic even though they do not.
- f) Victimisation: where a person is subjected to a detriment because they have supported or raised a complaint under the Equality Act 2010 or are suspected of doing so.

Document Revision

Changes to specific sections of the document from the previous version are listed below:

Section	Details of Change