

Equality Policy

Equita is wholly committed to the practice of equal opportunities and good race relations in employment and this is deeply embedded in every aspect of our working life.

In local government however we are aware that there are additional obligations placed on us by the Race Relations Amendment Act and the CRE Code of Practice for Employment. Whilst these requirements are already implicit in, and supported by, our Equality Policy we have supplemented this further with explicit commitments for our local authority clients. These are outlined below and should be read in conjunction with our Equality Policy on the following pages.

Our Commitments and Objectives

- Our commitment to equal opportunities and racial equality is promoted in all of our management procedures including recruitment and selection, training and development, promotion, discipline and dismissal, pay, benefits and all conditions of the service.
- Victimisation, discrimination and harassment in any form are unacceptable and are treated as misconduct by Equita in accordance with our disciplinary procedures. Where any employee complains of victimisation or harassment this will be dealt with under our grievance and harassment procedures.
- Guidance for employees is provided in Equita's Equality Policy, which is contained in our Employee Handbook and compulsory training is provided to all managers.

Monitoring

We actively monitor the application of our Equality Policy and undertake regular reviews of our existing procedures and amend and update where necessary to ensure equality of opportunity and good race relations is delivered in all areas of employee relations and management.

We have a formal system to help us actively monitor the profile of our workforce and guard against race discrimination within Equita. We are able to run detailed reports on the number of job applications and the diversity and profile of all our employees.

Where monitoring indicates under-representation of any group, we will review our procedures and policies and amend these regularly, where appropriate. In addition, we will take advice from CRE, racial equality councils or the Equality in Employment Advisory Service; and we are committed to taking appropriate actions as a result of that advice.

Consultation

Equita ensures that consultation on race equality issues is undertaken at a local level normally via our staff associations. This remains a regular agenda item for discussions within the managements meetings. We promote an "open door" policy in order that our

employees can discuss workplace issues or concerns on any matter directly with management.

NB – This policy is owned and updated by Adrian Bates, Equita’s Equal Opportunities Committee Chair, who oversees the effective implementation of this policy and any amendments.

This policy covers all Equita employees, regardless of position or status, and to contractors and sub-contractors where utilised.

Equita’s commitment to the principle of equal opportunity in employment is a feature of its employment practices and procedures. Equita implements and monitors an Equality Policy to prevent unlawful discrimination and ensure that equal opportunity is genuinely available. We are committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity in all areas of work and employee relations, and our policy is clearly communicated to all employees.

It is the policy of the company that no person acting on our behalf shall discriminate in any situation against another individual or group, directly or indirectly, because of sex, marital status, age, disability, colour, race, nationality, citizenship, ethnic or national origin, creed religion or sexual orientation.

These principles apply to recruitment selection, training, promotion, transfer, pay, benefits and performance appraisal procedures in addition to all terms and conditions of employment. To ensure that Equita maintains the highest standards of equal opportunities, existing procedures and criteria are regularly reviewed and, if considered necessary, changes are made. The application of our policy is monitored at line, senior and executive management level.

Equita endorses the principle that the workforce should reflect, as far as is reasonably possible, the composition of the local community. We regularly monitor the effects of selection decisions and personnel practices and procedures to determine achievement of equal opportunity. Care is taken to ensure that information collected on any individual’s ethnic origins is solely for the purpose of monitoring equal opportunity and is protected from misuse.

Equita’s Equality Policy covers all aspects of our activities and ensures the company works in full accordance with all relevant legislation, including:

- [The Race Relations Act 1976, as amended by the Race Relation \(Amendment\) Act 2000](#)
- [The Race Relations Code of Practice for the elimination of racial discrimination and the promotion of equality of opportunity in employment as approved by Parliament in 1983](#)
- [The Race Relations Act \(Amendment\) Regulations 2003](#)
- [The Employment Equality \(Religion or Belief\)\(Amendment\) Regulations 2003](#)

- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995
- The Equal Pay Act 1970 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (Amendment) Regulations 2003
- The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- The Age Discrimination Act 2006
- The Equality Act 2010

Although primary responsibility for providing equal opportunity rests with Equita as the employer, individual employees at all levels and of all racial groups also have responsibility.

Equita believes that our success is a direct result of the experience and quality of our employees. We are therefore committed to focusing our employment procedures and practices on maximising the potential of each unique individual contribution. We believe this is best achieved by developing our employees' talents whilst recognising their differences. By treating people fairly and equally, but accepting and embracing their diversity, we can also improve our market competitiveness, foster innovation and enhance our corporate responsibility and employee relations.

Aims

- To ensure equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace and community.
- To offer fair treatment in every aspect of working life in Equita, from our written procedures through to every decision made.
- To promote a culture where each employee and colleague is treated with respect and dignity and recognises the value that a diverse workforce can bring.

To achieve these aims, Equita will commit to the following:

- Ensure that the principles of this policy are embedded in HR strategy and all policies and procedures are regularly monitored and reviewed
- Provide awareness training and guidance to all employees and managers to ensure Equita's commitment to diversity is known and understood. This will be achieved mainly through e-Induction, Managers' Guide training and our Employee Handbook
- Monitor and measure diversity at every stage of employment to remove any direct or indirect discrimination
- Challenge and investigate discriminatory behaviour and enforce the disciplinary procedure, when this is considered necessary
- Communicate and regularly review the positive initiatives that have been implemented and ensure ever wider access to them
- Support and uphold the communities in which we live and work and ensure that we are involved, accessible, socially responsible and perceived as a positive presence
- Work with external groups and advisory bodies to keep up-to-date and aware of the necessary issues and best practice.

Recruitment and Selection

Equita's recruitment policy is based solely on the necessary and justifiable job requirements and the individual's ability and fitness for the work.

Job descriptions and personnel specifications are drawn up for each vacant post. Where posts are advertised externally, consideration is given to the most appropriate outlets to ensure that a wide range of potentially suitable applicants have the opportunity to apply.

Selection methods, including interviews, are conducted in accordance with documented and standardised procedures and checklists, designed to ensure that discrimination forms no part of the recruitment process. The objective is to make each appointment on the grounds of selecting the most suitable candidate for the post.

Vacancies are advertised internally and externally. Where advertised externally, the most appropriate outlets are considered so that the widest ranges of potentially suitable applicants are given the opportunity to apply. These include job centres, local journals and media and national press. Recruitment advertisements contain an appropriate statement on our commitment to equal opportunities.

Analysis of successful and unsuccessful applicants by sex, marital status, race/ethnic origin and disability is carried out to ensure that discrimination does not occur. Ongoing monitoring and analysis of these reports provides the basis for appropriate action to be taken to eliminate any unlawful direct or indirect discrimination.

Training, Development and Promotion

Equita's comprehensive training and development programme provides employees with the appropriate skills and knowledge to ensure success in their roles and fulfilment of their career potential.

Our performance review and appraisal systems ensures that all staff have the opportunity to take part in job specific training and receive an individual performance plan designed to promote their opportunities and career advancement. The appraisal process is carried out in accordance with clearly laid down criteria to ensure that its application is free from discrimination at every stage.

Whenever undertaking processes to select between groups of staff, for instance for promotion or in redundancy situations, Equita undertakes to ensure that a fair and consistent procedure is applied and that the selection criteria applied are free from discrimination and based on objective assessments of competence. Promotion opportunities are available to all our employees on an equal basis.

Disability

Our Equality Policy encompasses people with disabilities. Wherever possible, disabled applicants are considered without reference to their disabilities. If possible, jobs and workplaces are adapted to the needs of disabled employees.

Maternity and Paternity Leave

Equita makes full provision for maternity leave and recognises the statutory rights of all women to return to work.

Female employees are allowed reasonable time off work, at full pay, to attend antenatal care, parenting and relaxation classes. Maternity leave is counted as continuous service for calculating statutory rights and entitlements.

Equita also recognises the role fathers and adoptive parents play in caring for their children and, in accordance with the Employment Act 2002, grants two weeks paid paternity leave for working fathers and twenty-six weeks paid and twenty-six weeks unpaid leave for working adoptive parents.

Requests from parents to change the number or pattern of hours worked to accommodate childcare arrangements are considered sympathetically.

Pay Awards

Equita's arrangements for determining employees' salaries are based on the principle of rewarding individual merit. The procedures used to operate these arrangements are designed to ensure that pay awards are based on objective criteria free from discrimination and have due regard to the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

Flexible Working

Equita believes in allowing employees to balance their work and family responsibilities and, in accordance with the Employment Act 2002, we consider all requests to change to flexible working in an objective and sensitive manner.

Grievance Procedure

While it is hoped and intended that most problems can be resolved on an informal basis, Equita's grievance procedure exists to enable causes of genuine concern to be dealt with equitably.

Any employee who believes he/she has been discriminated against (including harassment) can raise the matter under the Grievance Procedure or by using the Open Door Policy (where any employee can discuss any matter with his/her manager or another manager or any Director, in complete confidence). A clear and well publicised Grievance Procedures ensures that every opportunity is provided to address any area or situation where discrimination is perceived to have arisen.

Disciplinary Procedures

Equita takes a serious view of any and all discrimination, and any breach of this Equality Policy will be treated as a disciplinary offence and dealt with in accordance with the company's disciplinary procedures.

Policy Review

Equita has formulated an equal opportunities committee, to implement our policy. The committee consists of the Managing Director, the appointed Equal Opportunities Officer and our Human Resources Representative.

This committee meets on a regular basis to review the effectiveness of the policy and to:

- Analyse the information provided by the monitoring process
- Assess this information against the objectives stated within the policy to identify how the policy is working in practice
- Suggest remedies for any failures that may be identified
- Assess the success of the proposed remedies over time

On an annual basis the committee also considers the overall Equality Policy and, if required, amendments are made and an updated policy is issued, which is communicated to all employees.

To ensure that this policy and other procedures are operating effectively, Equita continuously monitors and measures the records of our employees, benchmark our performance as a company and ensure that any patterns or trends are identified.

To achieve the aims and commitments of this policy, Equita will ensure that further monitoring will take place, in the form of:

- A questionnaire for all new staff
- Quarterly statistics, broken down into diversity categories
- Continuous monitoring of our central employee database to ensure the application and effectiveness of this policy

Communication to Employees

A copy of our Equality Policy is issued to all employees upon commencement of their employment with Equita. Employees are also made aware of their responsibilities during their induction training and also receive our Employee Handbook and access to our Intranet, which provides regular updates on all policies operated through the company.