



**St Mary's
University College
Belfast**
A College of Queen's University

St Mary's University College

Equal Opportunities Policy

1. Statement of Policy

The aim of this policy is to communicate the commitment of the Board of Governors, Principal, and the Strategic Management Team to the promotion of equality of opportunity in St Mary's University College (the College).

It is the College's policy to provide employment equality to all members of staff (whether full time, part time, temporary or permanent), irrespective of:

- Gender, including gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity;
- Marital or civil partnership status;
- Religious belief
- Political opinion;
- Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins, being an Irish Traveller);
- Disability;
- Sexual Orientation;
- Age.

The College is opposed to all forms of unlawful discrimination. All job applicants, members of staff and others who work for it will be treated fairly and will not be discriminated against on any of the above grounds. Decisions about recruitment and selection, promotion, training or any other benefit will be made objectively and without unlawful discrimination.

The College recognises that the provision of equal opportunities in the workplace is not only good management practice; it also makes sound business sense. This equal opportunities policy will help all those who work for the College to develop his/her full potential in line with organisational needs, thus ensuring the talents and resources of the workforce will be utilised fully to maximise the efficiency of the organisation.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 also places a statutory duty on the College to have due regard to the promotion of equality and good relations internally and externally.

2. Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to the Board of Governors, the Strategic Management Team and all current and prospective members of staff of the College. The College is committed to the principles and practice of Equality. The College also values the diversity of the local population. Therefore, the College services, facilities and resources are to be accessible and useful to every citizen regardless of gender, age, ethnic origin, religious belief, political opinion, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or any other individual characteristic which may unfairly affect a person’s opportunities in life.

3. Definitions

Direct Discrimination	This consists of treating a person less favourably than others have been or would be treated in the same circumstances. It should be noted that the intention or motive of the respondent to discriminate is not a necessary condition to liability.
Indirect Discrimination	This consists of applying a provision, criterion or practice which is not relevant in the circumstances and which, even without intent, adversely affects considerably more of one group than another.
Victimisation	This consists of treating a person less favourably than others have been or would be treated in the same circumstances because the person may have made a complaint or allegation of discrimination, or acted as a witness or informant in connection with proceedings under the legislation or the College’s Disciplinary/Bullying & Harassment Procedure.

Harassment	Harassment is defined as unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating the person's dignity or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person. The conduct shall be regarded as having this effect only, if having regard to all of the circumstances and in particular the alleged victim's perception, it should be reasonably considered as having that effect.
Disability	A physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

4. Procedure for Implementation

4.1 Responsibility

The Board of Governors and Strategic Management Team have specific responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy. All managerial and supervisory staff have responsibility for promoting equality of opportunity and for ensuring the policy is implemented. It is everyone's responsibility to ensure that equality of opportunity is a reality in the day-to-day workings of the College.

Any breaches of the College's Equal Opportunities Policy will be regarded as misconduct and could lead to disciplinary proceedings. Where individuals commit an unlawful act of discrimination they may be liable, as individuals, if the College can show that it took such steps as were reasonably practicable in order to prevent each act in question.

The Equal Opportunities Officer will be responsible, under the direction of the Principal, for monitoring, co-ordinating and developing the Equal Opportunities Policy.

The operation of this policy will be kept under review to ensure its continued effectiveness and an annual report will be made by the Equal Opportunities Officer on the working of the Equal Opportunities Policy to the College Board of Governors.

4.2 Implementation

In order to implement this policy, the College shall:

- Communicate the policy to members of staff, job applicants and relevant others (such as contract or agency workers);
- Incorporate specific and appropriate duties in respect of implementing the equal opportunities policy into job descriptions and work objectives of all staff;
- Provide equality training and guidance as appropriate, including training on induction and management courses.
- Ensure that those who are involved in assessing candidates for recruitment or promotion will be trained in non-discriminatory selection techniques;
- Incorporate equal opportunities into general communications (e.g. intranet);
- Obtain commitments from other persons or organisations such as subcontractors or agencies that they too will comply with the policy in their dealings with the organisation and workforce;
- Ensure that adequate resources are made available to fulfil the objectives of the policy.

4.3 Positive/Affirmative Action

Where appropriate, lawful positive action measures such as special encouragement in advertisements or special training will be developed.

These measures are available to us in certain circumstances, for example where there is an under-representation of a particular group in specific areas of work.

The College reserves the right to use Positive/Affirmative Action whenever it deems it necessary.

4.4 Good Employment Practices

This policy aims to ensure that good employment practices are used throughout the College which promote fair and non-discriminatory recruitment, selection, training and promotion procedures.

In order to achieve these aims the following initiatives will be implemented: -

- (a) All members of staff will receive sufficient information, advice and training to ensure that no discrimination occurs in the workplace;
- (b) HR policies will be designed to promote equality of opportunities for all members of staff.

4.5 Employee Relations

This policy aims to promote understanding and acceptance that prejudice and discriminatory practices are unacceptable and unprofessional and are not condoned by the College.

- (a) members of staff are encouraged to promote good relations between colleagues and discourage offensive and discriminatory behaviour;
- (b) all complaints by members of staff who feel that they have been discriminated against will be pursued through the Procedures for Dealing with Bullying & Harassment or the College Grievance Procedure, whichever is deemed to be most suitable in all the circumstances. All complainants will be protected from victimisation by virtue of this policy;
- (c) this policy will be regularly monitored and reviewed in order to assess its effectiveness.

4.6 Recruitment and Selection

The recruitment and selection process must be based solely on merit, using objective, non-discriminatory and work-related criteria in order to ensure that the most suitable person for the job, in respect of experience, abilities and qualifications is finally recruited.

The agreed Recruitment and Selection Policy is designed to:-

- (a) ensure that selection criteria are to be strictly relevant to the job specification for the position;
- (b) ensure that no provision, criterion or practice which cannot be shown to be relevant to the performance of the job is applied in the selection process;
- (c) remove unlawful discrimination from recruitment and selection processes and ensure that consistent use is made of the available guidelines;
- (d) develop professional awareness in all members of staff who are involved in the recruitment, selection and placement process, providing training and information where appropriate. Care should be taken to avoid perpetuating past discriminatory practices, e.g. word of mouth recruitment.
- (e) Advertise vacancies in a way that attracts the widest and best-qualified pool of applicants taking appropriate affirmative action measures if required.

4.7 Equal Opportunities Training

This policy aims to ensure that all members of staff, especially those involved in recruitment and selection, will participate in training programmes to develop their awareness of equal opportunities issues.

- (a) provisions of the policy will be an integral part of the induction training programme and will be incorporated into other training programmes as appropriate;
- (b) all members of staff will be advised of their obligations under equal opportunities legislation and the terms of this policy;
- (c) members of staff involved in providing training will serve as good role models to other members of staff participating in courses.

4.8 Monitoring and Review

The College will monitor and review its Equal Opportunities Programme so as to:-

- (a) assess the employment situation with regard to particular groups;
- (b) identify areas where change or improvements to policies or procedures may be needed;
- (c) identify the need for training;
- (d) measure progress in relation to fair participation and equality of opportunity.

A regular report will be made by the Equal Opportunities Officer to the March meeting of College Board of Governors on the workings of the Equal Opportunities Programme.

4.9 Complaints

There are people within the College who can help decide on the best means of addressing any issues or problems that exist and who can give confidential advice and support. These are:

- The Equal Opportunities Officer, Mrs Clodagh Hanna
- Your supervisor / manager
- Your trade union representative
- The Human Resources Officer, Mrs Anne Foster.

Individual members of staff who believe they have suffered any form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are entitled to raise the matter through the College Grievance Procedure or the College Procedures for Dealing with Complaints of Bullying and Harassment. Copies of these procedures are available on request from the HR Office or can be downloaded from the College intranet site. All complaints of discrimination will be dealt with seriously, promptly and confidentially.

In addition to the College's internal procedures, members of staff have the right to pursue complaints of discrimination to an Employment Tribunal or the Fair Employment Tribunal under the following anti-discrimination legislation:

- Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976;
- Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998;
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995;
- Race Relations (NI) Order 1997;
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003;
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006;
- Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970.

Members of staff, although not required by legislation, are encouraged to raise complaints of discrimination using the appropriate internal complaints procedures in the first instance. Strict time limits apply when lodging a complaint to the Fair Employment and/or Employment Tribunal. For more information or advice contact the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland and/or the Labour Relations Agency.

Every effort will be made to ensure that individual members of staff who make complaints will not be victimised. This consists of treating a person less favourably than others have been or would be treated in the same circumstances because the person may have made a complaint or allegation of discrimination, or acted as a witness or informant in connection with proceedings under the legislation or the College's Disciplinary/Bullying & Harassment Procedure. Any complaint of victimisation will be dealt with seriously, promptly and confidentially. Protection against victimisation in respect of any allegation made does not apply if the allegation was false and not made in good faith.

Victimisation will result in disciplinary action and may warrant dismissal.