

Introduction

Equality is at the heart of EKC Group's culture: we are fully committed to creating a fair and supportive learning environment for students which has respect, tolerance, understanding and a sense of belonging at its core. Wherever possible we will identify and remove barriers to inclusion and achievement. We will treat everyone with respect and dignity and will be positive and proactive about people's differences.

Whilst we have high equality standards, we recognise that we need to challenge and improve what we do so that equality continues to be at the forefront of our offer. Our 4 year equality action plan for students therefore identifies and puts in place the measures that we will take to do this. The plan is informed by:

- data trend analyses
- stakeholder feedback mechanisms e.g. Learner Voice, student experience walks, Student Rep meetings, student surveys and reviews
- self-assessment/quality improvement cycle outcomes
- best practice
- legal requirements
- local, regional and national priorities and initiatives

The plan covers Group actions i.e. those that are applicable to all Colleges and business units within EKC Group. Actions which are only applicable at a local level will be covered in annual College/business unit Quality Improvement Plans for the respective College/unit. This includes:

- Narrowing achievement gaps for certain cohorts.
- Addressing underrepresentation and actions for certain protected characteristics (sex, gender, race, disability).
- Specific actions to improve and foster good relations between groups of people with certain protected characteristics.

The plan will be reviewed and approved twice a year by Group Leadership Board and will be maintained and updated by Executive Director of Education. The Group's Student Equality Action Plan will be published annually on the Group's website.

Protected Characteristics

Each action plan objective is related to at least one of the Equality Act protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Public Sector Equality Duty

The objectives also support at least one element of the duty to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination on the grounds of a protected characteristic;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not.

1. Provide an accessible and welcoming application, recruitment/enrolment process for students which are fair and equitable and does not discriminate against those with protected characteristics.			
Key actions to achieve	Who	Progress	Impact by 2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Undertake focus groups with students to explore their views on accessibility and inclusivity of website and enrolment processes. Implement an electronic system for student enrolment (whilst being mindful that some students will need to continue to access paper-based systems) Incorporate consideration for students who have English as a second language. Embed accessibility into the process, based on the WCAG standard and the four principles of accessibility. Key staff inputting into the website undertake plain English training. Implement an application process which is accessible and inclusive for EHCP learners, which allows a streamline the process to application of all other learners. 	<p>Group Head of Student Experience.</p> <p>Group Director MIF</p> <p>Group Director Digital</p> <p>Director of SEND</p>	<p><u>May 2023</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of an electronic system for student enrolment has commenced and is being taken forward by Business Systems and MIF. A company has been appointed to design a new website of which a part being a new enrolment system, with accessibility and user experience and the heart of the decisions. Apprentices are now enrolling online. Accessibility tools built into the Group's website. All applications for EHCPs now sits in Enterprise system (Nov 22) <p><u>September 2023</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New website design and implementation is underway with accessibility and inclusion at the heart. EKC Development Day teach meet saw sessions on inclusion, how to make all resources suitable for hearing impaired learners. 	<p>Focus groups conducted with students indicate the process of applying and enrolling were clear and inclusive.</p> <p>Number of upheld discrimination complaints remains at 0.</p>
2. Develop all staffs' skills to support the diverse needs of students and break down barriers to participation and achievement within teaching, learning, enrichment and Work Placement to ensure that students feel that they are treated fairly and with respect			
Key actions to achieve	Who	Progress	Impact by 2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement guidance for staff on how to support learners with a broad range of protected characteristic. 	<p>Principals and Managing Director</p>	<p><u>May 2023</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Experience review/walks and question times held termly. Student feedback is positive and no equality related issues have been reported. 	<p>Pathway reviews, student experience and SLT question time reports that students</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Disseminate resources and information to staff and students to support awareness about regional, national and global campaigns and initiatives such as Black Lives Matter, tackling digital poverty etc. Develop the Inclusive Employer Toolkit Deliver training on “3 Tiers of Support” to all Senior and Middle leaders, to ensure skills and knowledge of how best to utilise Universal Support and ensure “All teachers are teachers of SEND” Develop resources and guides around key characteristics of SEND, rolled out on the CPD hub. To review to content of Teacher Training in line with the reformed qualification, to include specific content on Inclusion, E&D and SEND Explore the development of EKC Group wide Digital Groups, focusing on providing community spaces for protected groups such as BAME, LGBTQ+, Care experienced, Young Carers, Adult Carers and Menopause. Review effectiveness and impact of the embedding of core values of respect, tolerance and understanding via the performance and quality cycle: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Experience Reviews College Principal question times Pathway Review process 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enrichment teams offer an enrichment programme which incorporates equality and diversity themes focused on the 9 protected characteristics e.g. Black History Month, LGBT month. Feedback from lesson observations is that opportunities to explore these themes are being actively taken up by tutors. <p>Safeguarding Tutorials have developed over 22/23, with additional adhoc tutorials to tackle issues as they arise- all of which are differentiated and adapted to ensure accessible to all learners and staff.</p> <p>CPD Hub content around Inclusion has continued to grow, with over 5000 separate engagements with the Education page of the hub.</p>	<p>feel included, equally treated and valued.</p> <p>Students report via student experience walks and rep meetings that enrichment activities add value and enhance awareness of respect, tolerance and understanding</p> <p>Percentage of complaints relating to alleged discrimination reduces from 16% to 5%</p> <p>Number of upheld discrimination complaints remains at 0.</p> <p>No legal discrimination claims brought.</p> <p>Achievement gap between learners from different groups are either on par or improve by 2% year on year.</p>
		<p>June 2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training for designated staff ongoing at Colleges and business units Ongoing monitoring of achievement gaps at College/business unit level at termly progress boards. LSP Toolkit has been launched in Colleges. Implementation of Inclusion Strategy Safeguarding curriculum has been implemented with a collaboration group regularly reviewing, designing and implementing safeguarding tutorials for students. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the process for students with EHCPs who are transitioning from special schools to further education. <p>Supporting students out of digital poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide students with technology to enable them to effectively participate and achieve. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collation of student digital device accessibility and user skills during the enrolment term and supporting those that need further support with access to College laptops (via loans) or through bursary purchases. • Training for designated staff ongoing at Colleges and business units • All students receive anti bullying induction and ongoing learning throughout their programme. • Development and implementation of an online safety procedure and online safety module for students. • Instances of bullying monitored by Safeguarding Board and good practice and tools shared across the Group. • No complaints concerning discrimination have been upheld. • Student awards are linked to Group values. • Some Colleges have implemented focus months e.g. motivational month, appreciation month <p><u>September 2023</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • KCC working groups in collaboration with KFE colleges working on the improvement of process for EHCP learners transition. • IT Renewal strategy being written to ensure student devices are accessible, appropriate and fit for purpose. 	<p>Pathway reviews identify that employers feel informed on how to support all learners in accessing work placement opportunities.</p> <p>100% of students have access to technology where needed.</p>
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3. Ensure learners with protected characteristics are provided with the appropriate level of support which ensures that they are not disadvantaged in their future ambitions and life chances.			
Key actions to achieve	Who	Progress	Impact by 2026
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students work placement ensures positive progression of skills, knowledge, and confidence. Learners review the impact and learning opportunities of work placement with staff termly and are challenged to move on if suitable; ensuring no learner remains in unambitious or un-motivational work placement. • The Employer Inclusive toolkit is implemented to ensure employers have appropriate level of understanding and skills to be able to support our most vulnerable in work placement and ensure they are able to make progress. • IAG offered (such as guest speakers and employer activity) to showcase and celebrate diversity as a result of using external stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds, cultures and with protected characteristics. • Learners have access to relevant and robust personal development opportunities within and outside of the programme of study which supports them in developing the soft and transferable skills to succeed in life after their studies. 	Group Head of student experience, Group Head of Education, Group head of Careers and HE and Principals	<u>May 2023</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AG has a greater representation of a range of protected characteristics and backgrounds. • Employer Inclusive Toolkit full implemented and used amongst all ILOs • Case studies available from across the group of the positive impact of destinations for learners with protected characteristics. • ILO training (with Ex.D of Employer Engagement) to explore the lack of work readiness in learners and the impact on work placement. ILOs developing an employability tutorial to introduce into induction for all learners. • Level 1 Core Behaviour Attributes have been in place for the first year of the new curriculum reform with pathway reviews identifying they are in place and being used. Work to be done to further embed these so they underpin the curriculum and support positive progression. September 2023:	Feedback as part of student experience reviews highlights that work experience develops skills and confidence and positively supports future plans and ambitions. Pathway reviews identify that learners with protected characteristics can articulate the careers guidance and work placement opportunities they have received and its impact on their plans after their studies.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To develop a set of Level 1 “Core Behaviour Attributes” which support the learner in developing broader skills to prepare them for positive progression. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointment of Group Head of Alternate provision. Role will be key to reviewing the East Kent need of relevant provision for learners with extreme SEMH need. Pathway reviewed have identified inconsistency with implementing the Level 1 Core Behaviour Attributes as agreed by Ed Development Group. Review and training to be implemented. 	<p>Pathway reviews demonstrate that Level 1 curriculum is effectively developing learners “core behaviour attributes”.</p> <p>The % of learners from protected groups that positive progress is on par with other groups.</p>
4. Improve support mechanisms for mental health wellbeing for students			
Key actions to achieve	Who	Progress	Impact by 2026

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and Implement a Mental Health Strategy based on promotion – prevention – intervention that ensures a consistent offer for support and resources for mental health across all Colleges/business units • Use the student record system to flag students with mental health issues and track their retention, achievement and progression. • Staff to receive regular training and support on identifying mental health issues, supporting and signposting students appropriately. 	<p>Group Director Student Experience</p> <p>Mentors & Group Director MIF Director of Education</p>	<p><u>May 2023</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Mental Health Policy launched • Student Mental Health Charter launched • Designated staff trained to be Mental Health First Aiders • Colleges record students who have disclosed mental health issues on the vulnerable student risk register: Colleges to report annually on achievement. • Publicising of resources to help males talk about mental health issues/suicide. • Early draft of the Mental Health Strategy designed by external consultant. • Exploring a pilot of preventative mental health/resilience tool 'Equoo'. <p>Sept 2023</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full review of student mental health support conducted by Catherine Carden, with findings shared. • Proposed model for Mental Health strategy proposed. • First Draft of Mental Health strategy and action plan in development, with sharing of draft 1 during term 2. • Model of Metal Health first aiders being reviewed by Exec, Director of Organisational Culture. 	<p>There is no significant difference in achievement between students who have a mental health issue and those who do not.</p> <p>Fewer withdrawals where anxiety/mental health is sited as the reason</p>
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