

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Policy Statement

East Kent Colleges Group (the Group) is committed to its mission of 'developing the prosperity and wellbeing of the communities we serve' through ensuring fair access to education, equality of opportunity for all and embracing the diversity of our local community.

Promoting and embedding equality, diversity and inclusion in our culture and practices is pivotal to being an employer and a provider of choice. We also have a moral and legal responsibility to develop and support students to be responsible members of society. We will therefore take every reasonable step towards ensuring that equality, diversity and inclusion is at the heart of everything we do.

We will treat all staff, students, visitors and stakeholders with respect and dignity. We unequivocally oppose all forms of prejudice and will not tolerate any discrimination on the grounds of disability, marital or civil partnership status; race; colour; ethnicity; nationality; gender and gender identity, trade union activity; age; religion or belief, pregnancy, maternity, paternity or sexual orientation.

Under the Public Sector Equality Duty the Group will meet the requirements of the duty and will make best endeavours to go beyond the requirements where possible; in carrying out our activities we will consistently pay due regard to:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination
- Advancing equality of opportunity
- Fostering good relations between people from diverse backgrounds

Purpose and scope

The purpose of this policy is to demonstrate the Group's commitment to upholding and valuing the principles of diversity, inclusion, fair treatment and equality of opportunity.

The policy outlines the Group's commitments to the protected characteristics as specified in the Equality Act 2010 (and the Equality Act Amendments 2023) as well as the operational steps that the Group takes to advance and monitor equality within the organisation.

The policy applies to all members of staff and students, visitors, contractors, service providers, and any other persons associated with the functions of the Group. Subcontractors are expected to work in accordance with this policy and evidence how they meet any equality objectives as determined by specific funding rules. This policy covers all sites on which the Group carries out its activities.

Details

1. Definition of terms

- **Discrimination** is defined as an act which has the effect of treating a person less favourably because of factors related to their personal characteristics such as disability or sexual orientation, and unrelated to their merit. It can be direct (against an individual) or indirect (against a group of individuals that share the same protected characteristic). Discrimination on the basis of perception and association is also illegal.
- **Diversity** encompasses all forms of difference in individuals even if they are not covered by legislative acts, such as height and weight.
- **Extremism** can be defined as ideologies or beliefs considered to be far outside the mainstream attitudes of a society, generally to the extent that there is a violation of common moral standards. Extremism can take many forms, including political, religious and economic.
- **Harassment** is unwanted conduct which may create the effect (intentionally or unintentionally) of affecting an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment which interferes with an individual's learning or working environment. Harassment may be persistent or an isolated incident, and may be by an individual against an individual or involve groups of people.
- **Stereotyping** is defined as an entrenched view that one person or group of people holds in common about another person or group of people, and can be either positive or negative.
- **Positive Action** is the deliberate introduction of measures to eliminate or reduce discrimination, or its effects. It is not about special treatment for any one particular group, but the fair treatment of all people. It is distinct from positive discrimination which is unlawful.

2.0 Responsibilities

It is the duty of every member of staff, students and Governors to avoid discriminatory practices, to accept personal responsibility for the application of the policy and to bring any potential or actual infringements to the attention of management so that they can be addressed. Specific responsibilities are as follows:

2.1 Governors are responsible for:

- Ensuring the Group meets all its duties under relevant legislation. Receiving and approving monitoring reports on the policy through the Equality Action Plan.

2.2 The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for:

- Giving a consistent and high-profile lead on all equality issues.
- Promoting the equality policy both internally and externally.
- Making sure the equality policy and its procedures are followed.

2.3 Managers at all levels are responsible for:

- Putting the policy into practice, championing equality and diversity and acting as role models to ensure that it is promoted and embedded at every opportunity.
- Making sure all the staff know their responsibilities and receive support and training to carry these out.
- Taking action against staff or students who discriminate, harass or victimise others for reasons of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, gender reassignment, maternity and paternity, marriage or civil partnership.

2.4 All staff are responsible for:

- advancing equality of opportunity.
- operating within this policy at all times.
- challenging inappropriate, offensive or prejudicial language and behaviours
- completing mandatory equality and diversity training.

2.5 Contractors and service providers are responsible for:

- following the Equality Act 2010 and any equality conditions in contracts or agreements.

2.6 Students are responsible for:

- following the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- behaving in a manner that is in accordance with the requirements of the Policy.

3.0 Meeting the needs of students

3.1 Information, advice and guidance is available to all students in accessible formats that meets their individual needs. The ethos of information, advice and guidance within the Group is to challenge stereotypes within society, provide impartial support and to help remove barriers to individual achievement.

3.2 All applicants to the Group receive a fair interview process relevant to their needs, with reasonable adjustments made where necessary. Admissions and enrolment procedures will be supportive and as straightforward as possible.

3.3 All students receive a full induction which introduces the culture of the Group as a non-discriminatory, inclusive and liberating place to learn. As part of their induction programme, students will be made aware of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, the Student and Staff Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policies, the Student Code of Conduct and the Group's Complaints Policy.

3.4 Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities will have the same rights of access as other students. Guidance and support will be provided to enable such students to be integrated into the full range of programmes of study according to capability. The Group has an Inclusion Strategy in place to ensure that students are engaged and supported to achieve their potential.

3.5 The Group will endeavour to offer individual and flexible programmes of study to students who request and/or need them. Measures to assess and accredit prior learning and/or experience will be introduced where this is permitted by examining bodies.

3.6 Students who are eligible for support to complete their studies are assured of this support from the Group. This includes financial, learning and pastoral support.

3.7 Any Group originated curriculum materials will be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis to ensure that they do not promote sexism, racism, or any other form of discrimination. (An exception may be permitted with the inclusion of materials used for illustrative purposes within the context of the subject being taught). Any incitement of discrimination, harassment or extremist views will be tackled immediately by staff.

3.8 Diversity is celebrated by students and staff at the Group and enrichment activities support this agenda. Colleges hold events and activities through the year which celebrate and raise awareness of diversity.

3.9 The Group has a robust Safeguarding Policy which supports all students and ensures a safe and fair learning environment which is free from all forms of discrimination. The Group works in accordance with the Prevent agenda and is committed to ensuring all students are aware that behaviours and activities associated with discrimination, harassment and extremism will be promptly and robustly addressed.

3.10 The Group will aim to ensure that information about its programmes of study and services is made available to the widest possible audience. Publicity materials will be produced in a range of formats to avoid prejudice and stereotyping.

3.11 Marketing activities will seek to encourage participation from those groups currently under-represented in the Group as a whole and in particular areas of study. Materials will offer guidance on how to apply for financial assistance.

4.0 Staffing and recruitment

4.1 The Group embraces diversity in all its aspects and aims to employ a workforce, which reflects at every level, the community it serves.

4.2 In seeking to achieve a balanced workforce at all levels, the Group will ensure that no employee, job applicant or candidate for promotion will be disadvantaged or treated less favourably because of conditions or requirements that are not related to the job.

4.3 The Group has signed the Mindful Employer Charter confirming our commitment to support staff with mental health conditions from recruitment through to retirement.

4.4 The Group is also a Disability Confident employer which means that it is positive about employing disabled people and is committed to the following principles:

- To provide inclusive and accessible recruitment
- To ensure job adverts are advertised through a range of channels
- To ensure job adverts are available in accessible formats
- To offer interviews to disabled people if they meet the minimum criteria
- To provide reasonable adjustments for all interviews
- Support any existing employee who acquires a disability or long term health condition enabling them to stay in work

4.5 The Group welcomes the skills and contributions of all: terminology used in the recruitment process is inclusive and reasonable adjustments at interview are offered for neurodivergent candidates.

4.6 The Group will aim to ensure that all staff are recruited, selected, trained and promoted solely on the basis of ability and the requirements of the job. All staff will be made aware of the equality policies and the Group will ensure that our People policies and practice fulfil the principles of Equal Opportunities.

4.7 The Group encourages staff to voluntarily report their diversity data for the purposes of monitoring and development of meaningful actions to promote and support diversity.

5.0 Staff development and training

5.1 Staff are expected to complete training in equality and diversity when they commence employment at the Group and to refresh this regularly. Staff induction provides new staff with awareness about the culture of the Group and staffs' roles and responsibilities in ensuring equality and diversity is upheld.

5.2 All staff have a Continuing Professional Development Plan which should be regularly reviewed and updated. Development opportunities reflect the ethos of equality, diversity and inclusion with a range of learning and development opportunities offered to staff.

5.3 All staff have the same rights to training opportunities whether they are part time or on maternity, paternity or adoption leave. Training and development activities will be scheduled at a variety of times and on different days to accommodate a range of staff needs.

5.4 Lecturers receive training in embedding equality, diversity and inclusion within teaching learning and assessment and are supported through Group processes to ensure good practice is achieved within their roles.

5.5 Hiring managers receive training in fair and inclusive staff recruitment practices.

6.0 Commitments to the protected characteristics

The following gives further, specific details about the commitments that the Group is making to support equality, diversity and inclusion good practice in relation to the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

Age

The Group recognises that education is a life-long pursuit and, subject to formal funding arrangements, works to support students of all ages to achieve the qualifications they desire. The Group endeavours to provide appropriate support for all students within these boundaries.

The Group will not use age-related criteria for staff recruitment purposes, unless it is to take positive action.

All staff members have equal rights to training, promotion and other aspects of career development. Retirement age is when an employee chooses to retire and in line with legislation; the Group does not set a compulsory retirement age for staff. If a member of staff chooses to work longer, they cannot be discriminated against. It is an employee's responsibility to discuss when and how to retire with their employer. This could include phasing retirement by working flexibly and support will be given to them to make the transition i.e. advice on pensions.

Disability

The definition of disability is someone with a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities. When evaluating normal day to day activities, a person's ability to participate fully and effectively in work/study on an equal basis with others will always be considered.

The Group welcomes applications from people with disabilities and values the contribution they make; we will treat staff and students fairly should they become disabled and ensure, as far as reasonably possible, that they are not placed at a disadvantage.

The Group will pay due regard to reasonable adjustments for staff and students with disabilities such as:

- adjusting the premises
- altering working hours (or offering flexible learning opportunities for disabled students)
- allowing reasonable time off for treatment
- making Group materials available in the preferred format
- acquiring or modifying equipment

The Group has signed up to the Mindful Employer Charter and is a Disability Confident employer.

Ethnicity and nationality

The Group takes positive steps to market its programmes of learning and jobs to a wide audience to ensure diversity within the Group. Staff and students will not be discriminated against on the basis of ethnicity or nationality.

Gender

The Group will not discriminate on the basis of gender. We will ensure that staff and students have equal opportunities and will take positive action where needed to advance opportunities for the different sexes. The Group ensures that men and women receive equal pay for equal work but recognises that gender pay gaps exist. For this reason, we have a Gender Pay Gap action plan in place and we monitor progress.

Gender reassignment

The Equality Act covers direct discrimination, victimisation and harassment in employment or training on the grounds of gender reassignment, and it applies to both staff and students. It protects a person who intends to undergo, is undergoing, or has undergone gender reassignment from unfavourable treatment on the grounds of their gender reassignment.

This includes people preparing for medical treatment. Protection applies from the moment when the person indicates their intention to start the reassignment process, even if they subsequently change their mind.

To comply with this, the Group considers trans issues in the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and considers the impact of policies and procedures on trans staff and students. We also consult staff and students on their work to promote trans equality and tackle discrimination against trans people.

For further details and guidance on how we support transgender staff and students, please refer to the related Management Guidance document.

Marriage and civil partnership

The Group supports those in both marriage and civil partnerships. Civil partnerships and marriages have parity of esteem in the EKC Group and as such are accorded equal respect.

Pregnancy and maternity

The Group works to support all students to achieve the qualifications they desire including those who are pregnant, become pregnant or have recently been pregnant. Where the needs of the student conflicts with existing working or learning requirements, the Group will make adjustments, where practicable, to meet those needs. This may include adaptations for dress code or flexible timetabling. If a student discloses that they are pregnant at the start

of a course, appropriate advice and guidance will be given and risk assessments will be undertaken to ensure that the student is on the right course and can achieve. If a student becomes pregnant whilst on their course, a risk assessment will be undertaken and support measures will be put in place to ensure that the student can achieve. It is the responsibility of the student to disclose pregnancy.

The Group will take steps to ensure that there is no unfavourable treatment of any member of staff or job applicant because of their pregnancy or maternity status. This includes when they are breastfeeding. Less favourable treatment includes a failure to undertake a personal risk assessment for a returning mother or failing to provide suitable facilities for her to store and express breast milk.

Religion and belief

Where cultural or religious needs may conflict with existing working or learning requirements, the Group will make reasonable adjustments, where practicable, to meet those needs. This may include adaptations for prayer times, dress codes, dietary requirements or religious holidays.

EKC Group provides a multi faith room at the majority of its campuses for staff and students who wish to pray or reflect.

Sexual orientation

The Group is committed to working towards an environment where all people feel able to be open about their sexuality, and has begun working proactively to promote awareness and tackle negative stereotypes via groups such as the Student LGBT groups which exist in some Colleges.

Homophobic propaganda, in the forms of written materials, graffiti, music, emails, text messages, social networking websites or speeches will not be tolerated. The Group undertakes to immediately remove any such material whenever it appears on the premises and to take action as appropriate.

The Group will provide a supportive environment for staff and students who wish it to be known that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or asexual. However, it is the right of the individuals to choose whether they wish to be open about their sexual orientation in the Group. To 'out' someone without their permission is a form of harassment, and should be treated as such.

Assumptions will not be made that partners of staff are always of the opposite sex.

7.0 Implementation of the policy

7.1 The responsibility for making the Policy work in practice rests with all managers, staff supervisors, representatives, individual staff and students.

7.2 In ensuring that this policy is fully effective, and that all staff are committed to it, the Group undertakes to work locally in partnership with the recognised trade unions, and with staff in general, in its development and implementation.

7.3 The Group has a four-year equality action plan for staff and student and reports annually on progress against objectives. Equality, diversity and inclusion are embedded in policies and procedures and the Group's Policy Development Group maintains oversight and compliance.

8.0 Monitoring and review – students

8.1 The gender, ethnic origin, disability and age of all student applicants and enrollees will be monitored to inform Admissions policies. Course Teams will identify and monitor other socio-economic factors to inform curriculum development and ensure equality of opportunity.

8.2 Student experience surveys (start of year and mid-year) will ask students to feedback on how safe they feel and the Groups performance on tackling bullying and discrimination.

8.3 Retention, achievement and destinations by age, gender and ethnicity will be monitored to inform curriculum and assessment policies and address any achievement gaps.

9.0 Monitoring and review – staff

9.1 The Group will use the two main forms of monitoring, i.e. of the composition of the existing workforce and the recruitment process, looking at the workforce with reference to the majority of the legally defined protected characteristics (ethnicity, disability, age, gender, religion, sexual orientation and gender reassignment) so that equality gaps can be identified and addressed where possible. The Group will take positive action where possible to narrow and eliminate any gaps.

9.2 The Group will also categorise staff according to grade, contract type, i.e. whether full-time, permanent or temporary, age, length of time in post, place of work and salary. Records should also be kept of training, promotions, re-grading and discretionary pay awards.

9.3 After the employment relationship has ended, the Group will retain data about the composition of the workforce on an anonymous basis for the purpose of carrying out equal opportunities monitoring and will also look at reasons for resignations and staff turnover.

9.4 An annual staff survey will be undertaken which asks for staffs' feedback on aspect of equality, diversity and inclusion, such as culture and learning and development opportunities.

10.0 General

10.1 Staff and students are encouraged and supported in reporting any instances of discrimination. The Group will ensure that all allegations are fully investigated, and that confidentiality is maintained throughout any investigation.

10.2 If a member of staff believes they have not been treated fairly, due to prejudice, or discrimination, they should raise their complaint through the Grievance Procedure or if more appropriate the Anti-Harassment Procedure (staff).

10.3 If a student believes they have not been treated fairly, due to prejudice, or discrimination, they should raise their complaint through the Student Complaints Policy or if more appropriate the Anti-Harassment Procedure (students).

Related policies and documents

- Equality Action Plan
- Staff and Student Anti Bullying and Harassment Policies
- Staff Recruitment Policy
- Whistleblowing Policy
- Equal Pay Policy
- Maternity, Paternity, Parental and Adoption Leave Policy
- Staff Code of Conduct
- IT Acceptable Use Policy
- Redundancy Policy
- Staff Entitlement and Wellbeing Policy

- Inclusive Learning Policy
- Student Accessibility Statement
- Student Health and Wellbeing Policy
- Student Admissions Policy
- Safeguarding and Preventing Radicalisation and Extremism Policy