

Equality and Diversity Policy

Ambitious about Autism (AaA) and Ambitious about Autism Schools Trust (AaAST) are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion. As a disability organisation, AaA and AaAST believes in the social model of disability, and is dedicated to providing a working and learning environment in which the rights and dignity of all its members are respected.

We are committed to implementing the Equality Act 2010, and to proactively making reasonable adjustments to enable everyone we work with to participate fully in all aspects of our organisation.

One of our core values is supporting young people with autism to learn, thrive and achieve. We believe that embedding the views and voices of young people and adults with autism and their family members across our organisation and wider society is crucial to making this a reality.

We are proud to be diverse and inclusive organisation where individual differences are valued and where everyone is able to fulfil their potential. Any complaints of discrimination or harassment or bullying will be treated seriously and fully investigated and appropriate action will be taken by AaA/AaAST senior management.

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1 Introduction

AaA and AaAST strives for high standards both as an employer and as a provider of services. In so doing, we recognise the need for encouraging diversity and we wholeheartedly support a policy of equal opportunities in all areas of our work and responsibilities.

This policy provides guidance to enable all who work with or for AaA and AaAST to comply with anti-discrimination legislation. The organisation will not discriminate because of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender, marital status, having or not having caring responsibility or dependents, civil partnership, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age, physical, sensory or learning disability, mental health, political or religious beliefs or non beliefs, class, HIV status, employment status, unrelated or spent criminal convictions, and trade union activities.

All staff are responsible for the promotion and advancement of this policy. Behaviour, actions or words that transgress the policy will not be tolerated and will be dealt with in line with the disciplinary policy.

The equality and diversity policy is applicable to all members of staff whether permanent or temporary, full-time or part-time or employed on a casual/contract basis. The policy also embraces our service users, their parents or carers, trustees, governors, volunteers, suppliers and partner organisations.

AaA and AaAST's aims and objectives will be achieved through action planning, effective monitoring and a willingness to tackle problems where they arise. Ambitious about Autism is committed to reviewing this policy on an on going basis to reflect changes in the law, demographics and organisational requirements. An equality and diversity report will be presented to the Board of Trustees annually. Through our services, publications, communications activities, interaction with our stakeholders and other activities, Ambitious about Autism will ensure that those we work with know our statements of policy.

Ambitious about Autism will regularly review the implementation of its equality and diversity policy. Where evidence is found of ineffectiveness, remedial action will be taken.

Other policies to be referred to:

Dignity at work
Ex Offenders Policy
Special leave
Recruitment and Selection

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Redundancy Policy
Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk
Learning and Development
Health & Safety
Induction
Flexible working
Pay & Benefits
Induction

(please note the above are specific policies either referred to or implied in the Equality and Diversity Policy. All AaA and AaAST Organisational Policies are linked to Equality and Diversity.)

2 Purpose and Scope

Diversity

Ambitious about Autism aims to be an inclusive organisation where everyone is treated with respect and dignity, and where there is equal opportunity for all. AaA and AaAST respects and values the diversity of its staff and service users.

AaA and AaAST will actively encourage diversity to maximise achievement, creativity and good practice and to bring benefit to individuals and communities.

AaA and AaAST encourages all people it works with to contribute to an environment in which individuals feel comfortable expressing how they feel and what they need, knowing they will be treated with fairness and respect and that their contribution will be valued.

AaA and AaAST will tackle barriers to participation and create a culture in which equal opportunities and equitable treatment are a priority for all staff and service users. In the recruitment, training, pay and management of staff, and in all our day-to-day work with both colleagues and service users, we seek to create an environment where attitudes and biases that hinder the progress of individuals and groups are dismantled and where we work together in mutual respect, understanding and tolerance.

The way we work and learn within AaA and AaAST reflects the mission, values and objectives of AaA and AaAST and the spirit and intentions of legislation that outlaws discrimination and promotes equality and diversity.

AaA and AaAST will make reasonable adjustments to working practices, equipment and premises and offer, where appropriate, additional support to individuals to ensure they are able to take a full and active part in AaA and AaAST's work.

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AaA and AaAST will endeavour to deliver services in a way that genuinely recognises the importance of an inclusive society that brings opportunities and access to all.

Equal Opportunities

AaA and AaAST is an equal opportunities employer and provider of services. No individual will receive less favourable treatment on the grounds of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender, marital status or caring responsibility, civil partnership, sexual orientation, gender reassignment age, physical, sensory or learning disability, mental health, political or religious beliefs or non beliefs, class, responsibility for children or dependents, HIV status, employment status, unrelated criminal convictions, and trade union activities. Nor will such person be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be shown to be justifiable. This principle applies to recruitment, promotion, transfer, training, benefits, facilities, procedures and all terms and conditions of employment and service provision.

3 Aims and Objectives

The aims and objectives of the Equality and Diversity Policy are:

- To encourage, promote and celebrate diversity in all our activities and services
- To ensure equal access to jobs, volunteering opportunities and services
- To ensure compliance with legislation on discrimination and equality including Equality Act 2010, Employment Rights Act 1996, Protection from Harassment Act 1997, Employment Relations Act 1999, Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000, Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001.
- To promote equal opportunities in other areas not currently covered by legislation.
- To create environments free from harassment and discrimination.
- To maximise the use of resources in the best interests of individuals
- To confront and challenge discrimination where and whenever it arises whether it is between colleagues, or in any other area relating to AaA and AaAST's work.
- To make a willingness to accept and implement this policy to be a necessary qualification for any position in AaA and AaAST.
- To ensure, through positive action and reasonable adjustments, that AaA and AaAST's premises and services are accessible to all people.
- To ensure that employment and advancement within AaA and AaAST is determined by objective criteria and personal merit.

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4 Definitions

Equal Opportunities ensures that policies, procedures and practice within AaA and AaAST do not discriminate against the people within or associated with the organisation or individuals using its services. It is about treating people fairly and equally regardless of who they are, their background or their lifestyle.

Equality of Outcome ensures that policies, procedures and practices within AaA and AaAST recognise that different individuals and groups face different barriers to achievement. Thus AaA and AaAST, where possible, will ensure that we seek to redress imbalances by identifying, monitoring and, where necessary actively targeting under-represented employees and service users. We will do this through analysis of equality profile monitoring, and adaptations to our staff and honorary role recruitment processes.

Diversity ensures that all people are valued as individuals and are able to maximise their potential and contribution to AaA and AaAST and to the community. It recognises that people from different backgrounds and lifestyles can bring fresh ideas and a different approach, which can make the way we work and learn more fun, more creative, more efficient and more innovative.

The social model of disability states that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for people with disabilities. When barriers are removed, people with disabilities can be independent and equal in society, with choice and control over their own lives.

5 Key concepts of discrimination legislation

Under the Equality Act 2010, protection from unlawful discrimination is provided to the following nine protected characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion and belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

Direct Discrimination occurs when an individual is dealt with less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic.

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Indirect Discrimination means applying a provision, criterion or practice which applies to everyone in the workplace, but in reality disadvantages or has an adverse impact on certain groups of people who share a protected characteristic. However, indirect discrimination can be objectively justified where it can be shown that the provision, criterion or practice was a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Harassment is unwanted conducted related to all protected characteristics (except for pregnancy and maternity and marriage and civil partnership) which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It does not matter whether or not this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.

Victimisation occurs when an individual is treated less favourably because he/she has made or supported a discrimination complaint under the Equality Act 2010, or he/she is suspected of doing so.

Associative Discrimination is where an individual is dealt with less favourably for being associated with another person who has a protected characteristic.

Perceptive Discrimination is where an individual is dealt with less favourably based on a perception that s/he has a particular protected characteristic when s/he does not in fact have that protected characteristic.

Occupational Requirement is where the law recognises that there will be occasions when it is necessary to restrict certain jobs to certain categories or groups of people. This is rare and an employer would have to demonstrate that they have researched the requirement thoroughly before setting it.

Failure to make Reasonable Adjustments is where a physical feature or a provision or practice or measure puts a person with a disability at a substantial disadvantage compared with an individual who is not, and the organisation has failed to make reasonable adjustments to enable the person with a disability to overcome the disadvantage.

AaA and AaAST urges its staff and volunteers to be aware of the less obvious types of discrimination which result from general assumptions and preconceptions about the capabilities, interests and characteristics of individuals or groups of individuals.

Positive Action refers to measures or initiatives taken in order to address under-representation of groups of people who share a protected characteristic. Specific initiatives could include training and development activities or welcome statements in recruitment literature.

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6 Guidelines for managers / individuals

Policy Implementation: Responsibilities and Expectations

AaA and AaAST will seek to promote equality and diversity within the following framework of responsibilities.

Responsibility for implementing and developing the policy rests with the Trustees. The overall co-ordinating responsibility for equal opportunities and management of diversity is delegated to the Chief Executive. However, AaA and AaAST believes that all who work with or for the organisation have an individual responsibility: to accept the policy and ensure a personal involvement in its application; to co-operate actively to ensure that the environment we desire is a reality.

AaA and AaAST expects individuals:

- To work proactively to make reasonable adjustments to support the full inclusion of a diverse group of staff and service users in all aspects of our organisation.
- To co-operate with any measures introduced by AaA and AaAST to ensure equality of opportunity, diversity and non discrimination.
- Not to discriminate, harass, abuse or intimidate any other individual because of race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender, marital status, having or not having caring responsibility or dependents, civil partnership, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age, physical, sensory or learning disability, mental health, political or religious beliefs or non beliefs, class, HIV status, employment status, unrelated or spent criminal convictions, and trade union activities
- To feel sufficiently confident and empowered to inform the AaA and AaAST management and staff if they suspect discrimination is taking place.

AaA and AaAST expects its Executive Leaders and Managers:

- To ensure that proper records of employment decisions are maintained and regular reviews of employment practices are carried out
- To ensure that grievances are dealt with in a fair and consistent manner and in line with AaA and AaAST's Grievance Policy.
- To ensure that individuals within their teams are aware of their legal responsibilities, and of AaA and AaAST's Equality and Diversity Policy
- To promote actively the benefits of employee and other stakeholder diversity, in employment, services and training.

Policy Implementation: Recruitment and Promotion

AaA and AaAST strives to ensure that individuals within our organisation reflect the wider community. We are particularly keen to ensure the views and voices of individuals with direct experience of autism are embedded at every level of the

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organisation. This means we will explicitly welcome applications from these individuals when seeking to recruit new staff or honorary roles.

Clear and accurate information on vacant posts should be available through advertisement, job descriptions, person specifications and interview. Vacancies should be advertised sufficiently widely to reach the widest possible range of candidates, either internal and/or external. We will explicitly state that we will use our best endeavours to make recruitment materials available in a range of formats where requested, to ensure our posts are accessible to a diverse range of applicants. We will also offer to make reasonable adjustments to the interview and application process for the same reason.

All recruitment material should not imply any preferred group, unless an occupational requirement exists limiting a post to a particular group.

Applicants will be informed, through all recruitment advertising of AaA and AaAST's commitment to Equality and Diversity and the existence of this policy.

It is also relevant to ensure that potential applicants are aware of the safeguarding requirements of any role at AaA and AaAST, this is explicit in the appropriate section of the web site. AaA and AaAST has an Ex Offenders Policy which fully complies with Equality and other related legislation, such as Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974.

Person specifications may include 'essential' and 'desirable' requirements that are necessary and justifiable. Advice from the People Team where necessary, will be provided to ensure these are not discriminatory.

Individuals should be encouraged to discuss their development and training needs through a process of regular support and annual appraisals. Job titles that are discriminatory should not be used.

Policy Implementation: Interviews and Selection

Wherever practicable, shortlisting and interview panels will aim to reflect the diversity of the candidates and the wider community.

The short-listing panel will not discriminate unlawfully against individuals when selecting candidates for interview or appointment.

The interview panel must take extreme care not to ask discriminatory questions unrelated to the requirements of the job e.g. race, colour, nationality, sex or disability. All interview questions must be directly related to the job profile and requirements of the person specification.

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Policy Implementation: Learning and Development

In line with the intentions of this policy, AaA and AaAST will not discriminate in the provision of training courses/ development opportunities.

Appropriate training will be provided to enable individuals to perform their jobs effectively. The training offered will take into account the needs of all individuals. Briefing on this policy will form part of the Induction process for new staff and other stakeholders.

AaA and AaAST will provide a training programme in equality and diversity to all line and recruiting managers. The organisation will provide information to all existing and new staff to help them understand their rights and responsibilities under the Equality and Diversity Policy.

Policy Implementation: Harassment

AaA and AaAST is opposed to harassment in any form and is committed to providing a working and learning environment which is free from harassment and in which the dignity of all individuals within AaA and AaAST is respected.

The Dignity at Work Policy applies to harassment on any grounds, but AaA and AaAST particularly condemns harassment on any of the prohibited grounds referred to in the statement of the Equality and Diversity Policy.

AaA and AaAST is committed to providing effective mechanisms for dealing with complaints of breaches of its Equality and Diversity and Dignity at Work Policies, so that individuals within AaA and AaAST can feel confident in the knowledge that the organisation will deal with complaints seriously, promptly and impartially. Making a genuine complaint will not adversely affect a service user or a member of staff's prospects at AaA and AaAST. Mechanisms are in place to bring forward and address complaints at both formal and informal levels.

Policy Enforcement: Grievance Policy

AaA and AaAST recognises the need for a continuing commitment to genuine equality and diversity within the organisation. The effectiveness of the policy's aims and objectives can only be judged by how the policy operates in practice.

Any staff member or volunteer who feels they have been a victim of unlawful discrimination or unfairly treated in a way contrary to the intention of this policy should raise the issue through AaA and AaAST's established Grievance Procedure.

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Any service user who feels he/ she has been unfairly treated in a way contrary to the intention of this policy should make a complaint. If the complaint is about the Chief Executive, this should be made to the Chair of the Board of Trustees.

Any job applicant who believes that he/she has been treated unfairly and contrary to the intention of this policy should raise the issue with the People Team.

Policy Enforcement: Disciplinary Policy

All incidents of direct discrimination are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure. Incidents of indirect discrimination will be investigated to determine whether they should be dealt with under the Disciplinary Procedure.

Incidents of victimisation or harassment will be dealt with in accordance with AaA and AaAST's Dignity at Work Policy. Where incidents of victimisation and harassment are proven, the issue will be dealt with under AaA and AaAST's Disciplinary Procedure.

Any member of staff found to be in breach of this policy will be counselled on his/her actions and will be subject to disciplinary action in line with the Standard Terms of Employment. Any volunteer found to be in breach of this policy will be counselled on his/her actions and may, where necessary, be removed from AaA and AaAST's volunteer register.

Any member of any Committee or working group of AaA and AaAST found in breach of this policy will be counselled on his/her actions and may, where necessary, be asked to sever their relationship with AaA and AaAST.

Any service user found in breach of this policy will, where appropriate, be counselled on his/her actions and may, where necessary, may be refused future services from AaA and AaAST.

Policy Implementation: Service Delivery

AaA and AaAST will strive to ensure that all of its services are accessible to diverse users and comply with good practice guidance for accessibility standards and well-being of staff.

All the services which are provided by AaA and AaAST such as TreeHouse School and Ambitious Support will be designed and delivered in line with the guiding principles of Equality and Diversity.

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Where it is possible AaA and AaAST should ensure that the service providers used by the organisation adhere to legislative requirements and promote equality best practice.

Policy Implementation: Awareness Raising Activities

AaA and AaAST will promote its services and activities to diverse groups, and will work to reach those that struggle to access this information. AaA and AaAST materials will endeavour to represent and appeal to the full range of potential service users.

AaA and AaAST will seek to involve young people with autism in its awareness raising activities, enabling their voices to be heard by key decision makers, influencers and the public.

Ensure all our events, activities and publications are autism-friendly
Consistently seek feedback from stakeholders about how to become a more accessible organisation, and take action following this feedback
Embed our participation strategy across all areas of our work

Policy Implementation: Participation

AaA and AaAST will seek to involve service users in all aspects of its governance and operations through direct involvement, research and service users’ views will be taken into account in the review of plans and services.

Equality in Teaching and Learning

AaA and AaAST will assess all referrals for admission who have a diagnosis of autism and a statement of special educational needs. We will monitor the diversity of all referrals and not discriminate in any way.

Disability Confident Scheme

AaA is a Disability Confident Leader under a government scheme which aims to support equality and diversity in the workplace.

As a Disability Confident Leader we:

- Have undertaken the Disability Confident self-assessment
- Undertake all of the core actions to be a Disability Confident Leader
- offer at least one activity to get the right people for our business and at least one activity to keep and develop our people.

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Monitoring and Review

AaA and AaAST views that the collection/analysis of data is vital in informing change and improving performance. Where appropriate, statistics on AaA and AaAST’s services will be collected and analysed in relation to equality and diversity matters. We will review employee turnover and seek information on reasons for leaving. Local and national data or statistics will be used to benchmark our performance. Any personal data of employees or other individuals will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and the AaA and AaAST Confidentiality Policy.

The AaA and AaAST Board of Trustees will review annually equality of opportunity and diversity relating to AaA and AaAST’s services. Recruitment and selection procedures will be monitored and reviewed annually by the Director of People who will report to the Trustees. All aspects of personnel policies and procedures shall be kept under review to ensure that they do not operate contrary to the Equality and Diversity Policy.

In order to determine the impact of this policy it is important that a monitoring system be developed which will measure commitment, progress and effectiveness. The Equality and Diversity Policy will be monitored and reviewed as follows:

- The policy will be an agenda item at AaA and AaAST Executive Leadership Team meetings at least annually
- The Trustees will undertake an annual policy review.
- The review recommendations will be presented to the next Trustee meeting for their comments and ratification.

A part of the monitoring report should include the action plan for the following year to be agreed by the Board of Trustees.

Where it appears that there may have been or there is a breach of the policy, the Executive Leadership Team will investigate the circumstances and action will be taken to counter any proven breach of policy.

If it is found that the policy is excluding or discouraging the development of individuals or restricting service users, the Trustees should take positive action to amend the policy.

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