Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

CLASS Policy Framework

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1. Introduction

CLASS is committed to achieving a working environment which provides equality of opportunity and freedom from unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, pregnancy and maternity, marital or civil partnership status, gender reassignment, disability, religion or beliefs, age or sexual orientation.

This policy aims to remove or prevent unfair and discriminatory practices within the organisation, and to encourage full contribution from its diverse community. CLASS is committed to actively opposing all forms of discrimination.

CLASS recognises that promoting equality, diversity and inclusion is essential to our mission as a community-led charity. CLASS aims to provide support that does not discriminate in the means by people and groups can access our services and support.

CLASS believes that everyone is entitled to be treated with respect and dignity. We aim to create a culture where staff, volunteers, trustees and the communities we work with feel valued and able to participate fully.

This policy is reviewed, endorsed and approved by the board of trustees annually, or sooner if legislation or best practice changes. Day-to-day operational responsibility for this policy has been delegated to the CLASS Director.

Any and all personal data used in connection with this Policy shall be collected, held, and processed in accordance with our Data Protection Policy and relevant legislation

2. Purpose and scope of this policy

This policy applies to anyone working on behalf of CLASS, including senior managers and the board of trustees, employees, volunteers/student placements, and sessional workers.

The purpose of this statement of policy and procedures is:

- to enable staff and volunteers to recognise and understand how people are excluded and disadvantaged;

- to ensure people do not experience barriers to accessing our support, activities, or employment and volunteering opportunities;
- to improve our ways of working and behaviours in order to contribute to overcoming exclusion and disadvantage.

This policy applies to all aspects of employment with us, including recruitment, pay and conditions, training, appraisals, promotion, conduct at work, disciplinary and grievance procedures, and termination of employment. This policy does not form part of any employee's contract of employment, and we may amend it at any time.

This policy also applies to how we design and deliver our work, ensuring the support we offer is accessible, inclusive and responsive to differing needs.

3. Legal Framework and equality guidance

This policy draws on NCVO and Equality and Human Rights Commission guidance relating to the legal obligations of voluntary sector organisations under the Equality Act 2010.

4. Supporting documents

This policy statement should be read alongside other CLASS organisational policies and guidelines including:

- Anti-bullying and harassment
- Code of conduct
- Complaints
- Data protection
- Disciplinary
- Grievance
- Health and safety
- Recruitment and selection
- Safeguarding
- Prevention of sexual harassment

5. Definitions

5.1 Equality

Equality is about treating people fairly and consistently. Everyone is given the same level of respect, rights, and treatment, regardless of who they are. In the workplace this can mean:

- No discrimination based on protected characteristics
- Fair policies that apply to everyone
- Ensuring people feel valued and included

By being conscious of and actively challenging bias or prejudice we aim to ensure that no-one is treated less favourably because of who they are or what makes them different

from other people. This also requires a proactive approach to make reasonable adjustments that address the visible and invisible barriers people face.

5.2 Equity or Equal Opportunities

Equal Opportunities is about ensuring everyone has the same chance to access facilities, jobs, training, and progression.

Equality of outcomes is not just about giving everyone the same things; it is about giving each individual what they need to achieve fair access. This is about removing inequalities to make sure everyone has the chance to realise their ambitions.

As an employer this means removing any barriers so that people can compete fairly and have equal access to opportunities.

At CLASS this can mean:

- Fair recruitment and selection processes
- Training and development that is accessible to all
- Adjustments so people with different needs can participate
- Policies and processes that minimise bias in hiring or promotion
- Establishing policies and procedures that promote equal opportunities throughout the organisation

5.3 Diversity

Diversity means having differences within an organisation or setting. Diversity recognises we are all different in many ways. People with differing identities, backgrounds and experiences should all have equitable access to resources and decision-making.

5.4 Inclusion

Inclusion means being proactive to make sure people of different backgrounds, experiences and identities feel welcomed, respected and fully able to participate. It is not only about creating a diverse environment but also about ensuring a culture exists where individuals can be their full selves.

5.5 What are protected characteristics?

There are 9 characteristics protected by law known as protected characteristics.

The Equality Act 2010 says that you must not be discriminated against, harassed or victimised on the basis of any of these protected characteristics, including whether someone perceives you to have a protected characteristic or whether you are connected to someone with a protected characteristic.

Age: a person belonging to a particular age (for example 32 year olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30 year olds).

Disability: a person has a disability if she or he has a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on that person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Gender reassignment: this is the process of transitioning from one gender to another. Gender reassignment discrimination is when you are treated differently because you are transgender or trans (used as an umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth.)

Marriage and civil partnership: marriage is a union between a man and a woman or between a same-sex couple. Same-sex couples can also have their relationships legally recognised as 'civil partnerships'. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act).

Pregnancy and maternity: pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. Protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.

Race: refers to the protected characteristic of race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, nationality (including citizenship), or ethnic or national origins.

Religion and belief: Religion refers to any religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live to be included in the definition.

Sex: a man or a woman

Sexual orientation: Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

5.6 Direct discrimination

Direct discrimination is discrimination directly because of a protected characteristic. This occurs when an employee is treated less favourably due to a protected characteristic. For example, an employment application from a woman being rejected because the employer thinks that men have better technical skills. This is direct discrimination because of sex.

When direct discrimination happens to a person who has a protected characteristic this is sometimes called ordinary direct discrimination. However, there are also two other types of direct discrimination.

Associative discrimination is discrimination against a person because of their association with someone with a particular protected characteristic such as a friend, family member or group.

Perceptive discrimination is discrimination against a person because the discriminator thinks the person possesses that characteristic, even if they actually don't.

5.7 Indirect discrimination

Indirect discrimination is when a working practice, policy or rule is the same for all the people in a group and appears to treat everyone equally. However, in practice it has a disproportionate impact on people with a particular protected characteristic.

The legal phrase is provision, criterion or practice (PCP) and this can mean rules, requirements, conditions, policies and procedures.

PCPs can include:

- decisions around workplace facilities (e.g. toilets, rest areas and canteens)
- dress codes
- policies on ways of working (e.g. flexible working or working from home)
- selection criteria used in recruitment
- the way employees are selected for redundancy
- working hours

5.8 Disability discrimination

Disability discrimination includes direct and indirect discrimination, any unjustified less favourable treatment because of the effects of a disability, and failure to make reasonable adjustments to alleviate disadvantages caused by a disability.

5.9 Harassment

Harassment takes place when a person is subjected to unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.

Please also refer to our **Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy**.

The person being harassed could feel disrespected, frightened, humiliated, insulted, intimidated or threatened.

It is important to note that it can be harassment even if:

- the behaviour was not intended to have one of the effects above
- the person being harassed does not ask for it to stop

The unwanted behaviour can be a serious one-off incident or repeated behaviour.

It could be:

- verbal or written (it can be in person, or via phone or email)
- imagery
- street art or graffiti
- hand signals or body language
- imitation or mimicry
- remarks, jokes, or pranks

- physical actions

The law on harassment related to a protected characteristic applies when someone has a relevant protected characteristic. However, it can also apply if someone is harassed because they are thought to have a certain protected characteristic even when they do not, or because they have a connection with someone with a certain protected characteristic. It also applies if someone has witnessed harassment.

Examples of potential general harassment in the workplace:

- repeated unwanted contact or attention
- mocking someone persistently during meetings
- making threats or intimidating remarks
- spreading malicious rumours

Sexual harassment - Sexual harassment is any unwanted sexual behaviour that makes someone feel upset, scared, offended or humiliated, or is meant to make them feel that way. This type of harassment does not need to be related to a protected characteristic.

Please refer to our **Prevention of Sexual Harassment policy** (forthcoming) for further details of our policy and procedure in this area.

Less favourable treatment as a result of harassment - This type of harassment is when someone experiences less favourable treatment because of how they responded to previous harassment. It can apply whether the person rejected or 'submitted to' (accepted) the previous harassment.

5.10 Victimisation

Victimisation occurs when an employee is treated less favourably because they have made or supported a discrimination or harassment complaint, or they are suspected of doing so. Victimisation means suffering a detriment (less favourable treatment or having your situation made worse) because you've done or intend to do a protected act. A protected act means taking action related to discrimination law.

This includes making a complaint of discrimination or harassment, raising concerns, acting as a witness or supporting someone else's complaint. Protection from victimisation applies whether or not the original complaint is upheld.

It is important to note that the Equality Act only protects someone from victimisation if they've done something 'in good faith'. This means not acting maliciously.

6. We will promote equity, diversity and inclusion within our organisation by:

- Treating people fairly and with dignity and respect.
- Recognising and respecting differences.
- Making decisions or judgements about people based on individual merit and need not through bias, prejudice, assumptions or stereotyping.
- Creating a climate where everyone has fair and equal access to training, volunteering, employment, and promotion opportunities.

- Maintaining a working environment which is free from discrimination, harassment and victimisation or bullying.
- Ensuring the support we provide is accessible for all the Community Savers affiliates and leaders who we work with.
- Providing appropriate services that match differing needs, priorities and preferences across different social groups (within the boundaries of our organisational objectives).
- Striving to achieve more equitable outcomes for the communities we work with.
- Promoting good relations between people who have different backgrounds and experiences in everything that we do.
- Ensuring that the principles of respect, equality and diversity apply across all of our activities and that it is an integral part of business planning and delivery.
- Maintaining standards promoting equity, diversity and inclusion in areas of activity where we are sub-contracting with other partners.
- Taking any concerns or allegations about discrimination raised with our staff or volunteers seriously and acting on them with care and efficiency.
- Ensuring that all communication—written, verbal and digital—is accessible, inclusive and available in alternative formats where reasonably possible.
- Ensuring managers and Trustees model inclusive behaviour and actively challenge discrimination or exclusion.

7. Recruitment and selection

Recruitment, promotion, and other selection exercises such as redundancy selection will be conducted on the basis of merit, against objective criteria that avoid discrimination.

CLASS will use inclusive recruitment practices, including clear job descriptions, proportionate criteria, accessible interview formats and anonymised shortlisting where possible.

Under the Equality Act 2010, 'positive action' means the steps that the organisation can take to encourage people from groups with different needs, or with a past record of disadvantage or low participation, to apply for positions within the organisation.

If the CLASS chooses to utilise positive action in recruitment, this will not be used to treat people with a protected characteristic more favourably. It will be used only in tie-break situations, when there are two candidates of equal merit applying for the same position.

We are required by law to ensure that all employees are entitled to work in the UK and all prospective employees will be asked to produce original documents to satisfy current immigration legislation. Assumptions about immigration status should not be made based on appearance or apparent nationality.

8. Training, Promotion and Conditions of Service

All staff and volunteers will receive periodic training on equality, diversity and inclusion appropriate to their role. Training needs will be identified through regular monthly supervision and annual appraisals. Staff and volunteers will be given appropriate access to training to enable them to progress within the organisation where funding is available. Promotion decisions will be made on the basis of merit.

9. Termination of Employment

We will ensure that redundancy criteria and procedures are fair and objective and are not directly or indirectly discriminatory. We will also ensure that disciplinary procedures and penalties are applied without discrimination, whether they result in disciplinary warnings, dismissal or other disciplinary action.

10. Reasonable Adjustments

CLASS has a duty to make reasonable adjustments to facilitate the employment of a disabled person.

We encourage CLASS staff members or volunteers who are disabled, or become disabled, to tell us about their condition so that we can support them and make any reasonable adjustments as needed.

CLASS will make timely, proactive and effective reasonable adjustments. Adjustments will be reviewed regularly and agreed collaboratively. If we consider a particular adjustment would not be reasonable, we will explain our reasons and try to find an alternative solution. If we rent or purchase premises, we will endeavour to ensure they are fully accessible. Reasonable adjustments could include:

- Making adjustments to premises
- Re-allocating some of a disabled employee's duties
- Giving a disabled employee time off work for medical treatment or rehabilitation
- Providing training or mentoring for a disabled employee
- Supplying or modifying equipment, instruction and training manuals for disabled employees
- Any other adjustments that the Company considers reasonable and necessary provided such adjustments are within the financial means of the Company.

11. Part-time and fixed-term work

Part-time and fixed-term staff should usually enjoy the same terms and conditions as comparable full-time or permanent staff unless there is a justifiable reason for different treatment.

12. Procedure for reporting concerns about discrimination

We take a strict approach to breaches of this policy, which will be dealt with in accordance with our Grievance and Disciplinary policies. Serious cases of deliberate discrimination may amount to gross misconduct resulting in dismissal.

Staff members, volunteers, or trustees of CLASS who have concerns about discrimination should raise the matter through our Grievance Policy. Complaints will be treated in confidence and investigated as appropriate.

Any concerns regarding Sexual Harassment can be raised through our Sexual Harassment Reporting Procedure. Please see our Prevention of Sexual Harassment policy (forthcoming).

Members of the communities and associations we work with may raise concerns about discrimination through our Complaints Procedure or by speaking to any member of staff. Concerns will be handled sensitively and in line with safeguarding procedures where appropriate.

There must be no victimisation or retaliation against staff who complain about discrimination. However, making a false allegation deliberately and in bad faith will be treated as misconduct and dealt with under our Disciplinary Policy.

13. Responsibility for the Implementation of this Policy

All employees, volunteers, trustees, subcontractors and representatives of CLASS are required to act in a way that does not subject any other employees or service users to direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or victimisation on the grounds of their race, sex, pregnancy or maternity, marital or civil partnership status, gender reassignment, disability, religion or beliefs, age or sexual orientation.

The co-operation of all employees is essential for the success of this policy. Senior employees are expected to follow this policy and to try to ensure that all employees, volunteers, subcontractors and representatives do the same.

CLASS takes responsibility for achieving the objectives of this Policy, and endeavours to ensure compliance with relevant Legislation and Codes of Practice.

14. The Extent of the Policy

CLASS seeks to apply this Policy in the recruitment, selection, training, appraisal, development and promotion of all employees. CLASS offers services in a fashion that complies with the spirit of this Policy.

This policy does not form a part of any employment contract with any employee, and its contents are not to be regarded by any person as implied, collateral or express terms to any contract made with the organisation.

CLASS reserves the right to amend and update this Policy at any time.