Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy

March 2018
1. Summary

The success of AoC depends on its people. AoC is committed to valuing diversity and promoting equality for everyone in the organisation.

AoC operates under the principles of Equal Opportunity, insisting on and promoting equality of opportunity and access to all, regardless of age, race, colour, ethnic or national origins, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, disability, income, education, religious beliefs or cultural heritage.

AoC recognises that the FE Sector serves, and draws, on the talents and skills of a diverse population. The diversity consists of visible and non-visible differences. How we work with these differences helps to shape AoC as a successful modern organisation.

AoC also recognises and values the diversity which exists in society and is committed to encouraging the promotion and representation of all sectors within it.

AoC recognises the varied contributions that a diverse workforce brings to the organisation and is committed to drawing on the different perspectives and experiences of individuals which will add value to the way it operates.

This policy outlines AoC’s approach to ensuring that its approach to equal opportunities and diversity is up to date and consistent with best practice. AoC will:

- Seek to ensure that its workforce reflects the diverse communities it serves and that every employee is treated fairly during the whole of their working life
- Take action to eradicate discrimination and inequality when delivering services and when employing others to deliver services on our behalf
- Fulfil our obligations by adopting legal, national and local guidelines that seek to ensure equality of opportunity and eradicate discrimination
- Evaluate the impact of our policies, services and functions on our workforce.
- Make equalities a part of everyday working practice and train our employees to carry out this policy.
- Make any necessary changes to our working practices, our buildings and our publicly available information so that AoC and its services are accessible to all
- Work with others to stamp out harassment and intimidation.
- Ensure our suppliers and contractors act in accordance with this policy at all times.

2. Policy Statement

AoC is committed to equal opportunities and diversity not only in its employment policies but in the execution of all its functions and services and to the development of equality of opportunity and diversity within the FE sector. A genuine commitment to equal opportunities and diversity requires participation by all staff and subscribers.
All employees and Directors of AoC should accept personal responsibility in recognising and implementing the Policy in all aspects of their work for and on behalf of the organisation. Promotion of the policy forms an integral part of the job description of all employees.

AoC is committed to the following principles:

1. There should be no discrimination on account of age, sex, marital status, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, disability, religion, belief, race, nationality or ethnic origin.
2. AoC will appoint, train, develop and promote on the basis of merit and ability.
3. All employees have personal responsibility for the practical application of AoC’s equal opportunities and diversity policy, which extends to the treatment of employees, member colleges and customers.
4. Special responsibility for the practical application of AoC’s equal opportunities and diversity policy falls upon management involved in the recruitment, selection, promotion and training of employees.
5. AoC’s grievance procedure is available to any employee who believes that he/she may have been unfairly discriminated against.
6. Disciplinary action will be taken against any employee who is found to have committed an act of unlawful discrimination. Both discriminating conduct and harassment will be treated as gross misconduct.
7. In the case of any doubt or concern about the application of the policy in any particular instance any member of staff or employee should consult the HR Director
8. The AoC undertakes not to discriminate unfairly on the grounds of trade union membership and activity, political beliefs and unrelated criminal convictions.

2.1 Managing Diversity

AoC is committed to promoting equality and diversity and promoting a culture within which it actively values difference and recognises that people from different backgrounds and experiences can bring valuable insights to the workplace and enhance the way we work. AoC aims to be an inclusive organisation, where diversity is valued, respected and built upon, so that it is able to recruit and retain a diverse workforce that reflects the communities it serves.

AoC is committed to improving the diversity of its workforce and will seek to adopt employment practices that ensure diversity and a flexible approach including, where appropriate, positive action which serve to support this objective. This involves the periodic carrying out of diversity impact assessments on all our policies to ensure they are compliant with legislation and adhere to the spirit of this policy.

As an employer committed to diversity and equality the AoC recognises its success depends on creating a working environment which supports the diverse make-up of its staff with supporting policies and procedures to create a framework of assistance. For example, where an employee becomes disabled, whether through accident, illness or
injury, every reasonable and practicable consideration will be given to ensuring that he/she may remain in employment via a range of steps such as: making reasonable adjustments to premises, alteration of working hours, re-allocation of duties, time-off for rehabilitation, modification of equipment, provision of assistance and supervision etc.

3. Responsibility for this Policy

The AoC Board has overall responsibility for Equal Opportunities. The Board will:

- Ensure that the organisation is meeting its legal duties with regard to relevant legislation.
- Set the tone and influence the culture of Equal Opportunities & Diversity within AoC and set the standards and expectations of staff with respect to conduct.
- Satisfy itself that Equal Opportunities & Diversity is being actively pursued, with appropriate monitoring in place and that this policy is working effectively.
- Annually review the AoC’s approach to Equal Opportunities & Diversity and approve changes or improvements to key elements of its processes and procedures.

4. Implementation & Procedure

To effectively implement this policy, AoC will take steps to ensure that:

- All staff (and any contractors acting on behalf of AoC) act in accordance with this policy.
- Through policies, procedures and systems, job applicants or employees will be treated in accordance with this policy and other related policies.
- Any employment requirements or conditions will be justifiable and reasonable.
- All employment policies, procedures and practices, including this one, will be reviewed and impact-assessed regularly to ensure that they are, and remain, non-discriminatory.
- All managers and others involved in the implementation of the organisation’s employment policies will receive appropriate training including diversity, recruitment and selection, performance management etc.
- Reasonable adjustments will be made in the workplace to help people with disabilities achieve their full potential.
- Employees will receive training during induction and at other appropriate times during their employment to ensure awareness and understanding of this policy and diversity in general.
- Statistics on under-represented groups within the workforce will be recorded and reported to the Board and senior management team to ensure that the makeup of the workforce is monitored and remedial actions identified.
- A diverse workplace is promoted and celebrated through our policies and how we operate.
5. Appendices

5.1 Definitions

In this and other policy documents we mean by the following:

**Equal Opportunities**: is a descriptive term for an approach intended to provide a certain social environment in which people are not excluded from the activities of society, such as education, employment, or health care, on the basis of immutable traits.

**Equality**: can be described as breaking down barriers, eliminating discrimination and ensuring equal opportunity and access for all groups both in employment, and to goods and services; the basis of which is supported and protected by legislation.

**Diversity**: can be described as celebrating differences and valuing everyone. Each person is an individual with visible and non-visible differences and by respecting this everyone can feel valued for their contributions which is beneficial not only for the individual but for AoC.

**Equality and Diversity**: are not inter-changeable but inter-dependent. There can be no equality of opportunity if difference is not valued and harnessed.

**Direct discrimination** is where a person is treated less favourably than another in comparable circumstances on a prohibited ground.

**Indirect discrimination** generally occurs when a rule or condition which is applied equally to everyone, can disadvantage people from a particular group, unless it can be objectively justified.

5.2 Standards & Accreditation

As part of its commitment to the equal opportunities and diversity AoC is guided by the work of the Equality and Human Rights Commission and relevant legislation.

5.3 Relevant Legislation

AoC is committed to providing equal opportunities and in avoiding unlawful discrimination in employment. AoC accepts its obligations determined by the:

- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and 2005
- Civil Partnership Act 2004
- Employment Equality (Religion or belief) Regulations 2003
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003
- Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended)
- Sex Discrimination Acts 1975 and 1986 (as amended)
- Equal Pay Act 1970 (Equal Value Amendment 1984)
- Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974
- The Protection from Harassment Act 1997
- Human Rights Act 1998
- Gender Recognition Act 2004

It is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment or employment on grounds of age, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy, race, nationality, ethnic or
national origins, sexual orientation, religion or belief, or marital status. It is also unlawful to treat someone less favourably on grounds of disability than others without that disability are or would be treated, unless the less favourable treatment can be justified, or to fail to make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers to employment caused by disability.

5.4 Document Change Control

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See also: Recruitment and Selection Policy

Applies to: All AoC employees, including those that work in AoC Create, AoC India and AoC Charitable Trust.