

North West Regional College Policy and Procedures

Equal Opportunities Policy

Scope of Policy	All Staff
Date of Review	February 2026
Policy Review date	February 2029
Version number	Version 4.0
Policy Owner	Head of Human Resources
Approved by	Strategic Group
Equality Screening Date	Review

North West Regional College

Equal Opportunities Policy

Introduction

The aim of this policy statement is to emphasise the commitment of the North West Regional College (hereafter referred to as the College), to securing equality of opportunity for all employees and applicants to the College. The statement affirms that both Management and Unions will rigorously pursue the objectives and principles set out herein and be committed to promoting equality of opportunity and fair participation within the College.

It is the policy of the College that all eligible persons will have equal opportunity for employment and advancement in the College, irrespective of Gender (including gender reassignment), Marital or Civil Partnership status, having or not having Dependants, Pregnancy, maternity or parenting status, Religious Belief or Political Opinion, Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins or being an Irish Traveller), Disability, Sexual Orientation or Age. Selection for employment and advancement will be on the basis of ability, qualifications and aptitude to carry out the duties of the post.

We are opposed to all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. All job applicants, employees and others who work for us will be treated fairly and will not be discriminated against on any of the above grounds. Decisions about recruitment and selection, promotion, training or any other benefit will be made objectively and without unlawful discrimination.

We recognise that the provision of equal opportunities in the workplace is not only good management practice, it also makes sound business sense. Our equal opportunities policy will help all those who work for us to develop their full potential and the talents and resources of the workforce will be utilized fully to maximise the efficiency of the organisation.

This policy should be read and understood with other relevant College policies and procedures including the Recruitment and Selection Policy, Redundancy Procedure, Harassment Policy for Employees in Institutions of Further Education, etc.

Scope

All employees are bound by this policy to ensure that their behaviour at all times accords with the principles set out in this policy. Breaches will be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure.

The College will provide this policy in alternative formats on request where reasonably practicable, eg, Braille, Large Print, Computer Disk, Audio format, etc, and/or alternative language.

The College is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and good relations in accordance with Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. This policy should be interpreted in a manner consistent with the aforementioned legislation.

Definitions of Discrimination

Direct discrimination means treating a person less favourably on the grounds of Gender, Marital or Civil Partnership status, having or not having Dependents, Pregnancy, maternity or parenting status, Religious Belief or Political Opinion, Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins or being an Irish Traveller), Disability, Sexual Orientation or Age, or any other criterion which is not relevant or justified in law.

Indirect discrimination occurs where a requirement or condition which is not relevant or justified in law is applied equally, but is of such a nature as to be unfavourable for particular groups in that a considerably smaller proportion of the group can comply with it.

Victimisation means treating a person less favourably because they have or intend to take a complaint or may have helped another person to assert rights under equality and anti-discrimination legislation. Individuals have a legal right to make a complaint without prejudice to their existing, potential or future employment opportunities.

Harassment is unwanted conduct related to Gender, Marital or Civil Partnership status, Parenting, maternity or parenting status having or not having Dependents, Religious Belief or Political Opinion, Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins or being an Irish Traveller), Disability, Sexual Orientation or Age or any other behaviour which affects the dignity of a person and which creates an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive environment. Harassment complaints will be dealt with in accordance with the College's Harassment Policy.

Legal Framework

There is a legal framework to protect individuals from unlawful discrimination. This statement is designed to build on the statutory position and to reflect the spirit as well as the letter of the legislation.

The existence of law and agreed procedures cannot of themselves ensure that any policy of non-discrimination will work effectively. This will be achieved only when staff at all levels critically examine their attitudes and ensure that no trace of unlawful discrimination is allowed to affect their judgement.

The College recognises its obligations under equality and anti-discrimination legislation.

Unlawful Discrimination

Unlawful discrimination means acting in such a way as to place any individual at a disadvantage or treat him or her less favourably because of factors which are irrelevant in any aspect of the employment relationship.

Care must be taken to guard against more subtle and unconscious forms of unlawful discrimination that may not be immediately obvious. These may result from general

assumptions about the capabilities, characteristics or interests of particular groups that influence the treatment of individuals or groups. They may also take the form of applying conditions or requirements without considering whether they operate disproportionately to the disadvantage of particular groups.

There must be no direct or indirect discrimination or victimisation against any applicant, potential applicant or employee.

There must be no discrimination in the form of harassment of any individual or group.

The College will promote a supportive neutral and harmonious work environment free from material or behaviour likely to be offensive, provocative, intimidate or in any way likely to cause apprehension to any employee.

All staff with a managerial or supervisory responsibility for staff will ensure their conduct at all times accords with this policy. They must take appropriate action to deal with any members of their staff or any breach of this policy within their areas of responsibility.

Recruitment and Promotion

As an equal opportunity employer the College will normally endeavour to reach the widest possible labour market. Advertisements must not be confined unjustifiably to geographical areas of media publications that would exclude or disproportionately reduce the number of applicants from a particular group. Criteria will be assessed to ensure they are job related and do not directly or indirectly discriminate against any groups.

A statement promoting the College's Equal Opportunities Policy will be included in all relevant advertisements.

Career Development

Staff will be given equal opportunities for training and development to enable them to acquire necessary skills and allow them to achieve their full potential.

Accommodation

In the siting or re-siting of College premises the equal opportunity dimension of a location will be taken fully into account together with all other relevant factors.

Domestic Responsibilities

It is in the interests of the College that it retains trained staff. Management in consultation with staff representations should consider what steps can be taken, consistent with the justifiable needs of the service, to enable staff to reconcile their work with their domestic responsibilities. Staff should be made aware of existing provisions such as maternity/paternity/adoption leave, job sharing, career breaks and flexible working arrangements.

Complaints of Unlawful Discrimination

Persons who believe they have been unlawfully discriminated against are entitled to raise the matter through the agreed procedure. The procedures are as follows:

- Grievance Procedure;
- Complaints Procedure incorporated within the Equality Scheme;
- Selection and Recruitment Complaints (to be raised with the Head of Human Resources in the first instance).

All complaints of discrimination will be dealt with seriously, promptly and confidentially.

These internal procedures do not replace or detract from the right of employees to pursue complaints under the relevant anti-discrimination legislation.

Individuals should check with the statutory agencies regarding time limits within which complaints must be lodged.

It is the policy of the College that staff who make a complaint in respect of alleged unfair and/or unlawful discrimination or maladministration will not be subject to any form of victimisation. Acts of discrimination, victimisation or harassment perpetrated by a member of staff of the College against any other staff will result in disciplinary action.

It should be noted that complaints can also be brought against individuals as well as the College.

Implementation

The Principal and Chief Executive of the College is responsible for ensuring that the policy statement is implemented and reviewed on a regular basis.

The Head of Human Resources is responsible for monitoring, co-ordinating and developing the policy. Line managers are responsible for ensuring that all staff for which they have responsibility are aware of the College's policy on equal opportunities and that there is no unlawful discrimination of any kind.

In order to implement this policy the College will ensure that:

- The policy is communicated to all employees, through induction training, management training, team briefings, display on noticeboards/staff handbook and made known to job applicants;
- Specific and appropriate duties in respect of implementing the equal opportunities policy is incorporated into job descriptions and appraisal objectives of staff;
- Those who are involved in assessing candidates for recruitment or promotion will be trained in non-discriminatory selection techniques;

- The College obtains commitments from other persons or organisations such as subcontractors or agencies that they too will comply with the policy in their dealings with our organisation and our workforce;
- Managers and supervisors are aware of their responsibilities through appropriate training;
- An equal opportunities programme will be developed and will include a range of initiatives, indicating where appropriate affirmative/positive action, with targets and timetables;
- Consultation will take place with recognised trade unions/employee representatives on the implementation of this policy and any amendments to practice;
- An information system will be established to assist the effective implementation of this policy and guidelines will be drafted for assessing the provision of equality of opportunity;
- Adequate resources are made available to fulfil the aims of this policy.

Monitoring

The composition of staff, applicants for employment and appointees will be monitored on the basis of Gender, Marital or Civil Partnership status, having or not having Dependents, Pregnancy, maternity or parenting status, Religious Belief or Political Opinion, Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins or being an Irish Traveller), Disability, Sexual Orientation or Age, to measure the effectiveness of this policy. Monitoring provides an objective view of the existence and progress of equality of opportunity.

The College will take such affirmative action as is deemed lawful, appropriate and necessary to ensure equality of opportunity. Goals and timetables, where appropriate, will be set to measure progress that can reasonably be expected as a result of affirmative action.

Regular Review

The College is committed to a process of consultation with recognised trade unions and staff representatives on the policy and practices outlined in the statement. These will be regularly reviewed to ensure that the College's objectives on equality of opportunity are assessed and that appropriate affirmative action as is deemed lawful, appropriate and necessary is taken.

Agreement

This policy statement has been agreed by the College and the relevant trade unions.

Summary of Changes

Version No	Policy Owner	Changes	Date
3.0	Human Resources Manager	Pg. 7 Summary of Changes Table added	9 February 2023
4.0	Head of Human Resources	Reviewed in accordance with legislative requirements in Northern Ireland. Changes HR Manager to Head of Human Resources Add Pregnancy, maternity or parenting status as protected characteristic	23 February 2026