



Optimum Skills  
Limited

## Equality and Diversity Policy

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## 1. Background

- 1.1.1. Optimum Skills is committed to creating an environment where all customers, learners and staff celebrate equality and diversity in all activities. We value diversity and promote equal opportunities for everyone.
- 1.1.2. Optimum Skills is committed to creating a place where everyone: is fully respected, listened to, encouraged to give their views, made to feel welcome and is treated with fairness and equity.
- 1.1.3. Optimum Skills is committed to ensure legal compliance defined by the Equality Act 2010 which consolidates protection against discrimination for the nine protected characteristics: Age, Sex, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion or Belief and Sexual Orientation.
- 1.1.4. Optimum Skills recognises its legal obligation under the public sector equality duty to: eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (not in respect of marriage or civil partnership), foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not (not in respect of marriage or civil partnership) and to publish: equality objectives, at least every four years and provide information to demonstrate compliance.



Diane Shakespeare

Managing Director – Optimum Skills Limited

## 2. Scope

- 2.1.1. This policy applies to the whole of the Optimum Skills organisation, its employees, and learners.

## 3. Definitions

- 3.1.1. Terminology used that requires understanding and clarification in order to meet the intention of the policy document. These may be of a legal nature or specific to the organization or the type of work. Therefore, the inclusion of definitions provides a clear understanding of key terms used in the policy document. It is advisable to cite the authority for the definitions being used

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## 4. Statement

### 4.1.1. Optimum Skills will work to ensure that:

- Apprentices and learners have accessible information available to them in a format which meets their needs.
- Equality of opportunity is embedded in all policies, practices, decision-making and evaluation processes.
- Equality and diversity form a major part of our core values and all staff understand these values and implement them.
- All staff members complete a Level 2 Award in Equality and Diversity within the first 3 months of employment.
- We review data regularly to ensure that we complement local equality and diversity data and to ensure equality of opportunity. These results will be reviewed at Manager's meetings and shared with staff.
- Learners receive an overview of the policy and contact details of our Equality and Diversity champion within the handbook they receive before commencing training.
- Equality and diversity are embedded in each programme to ensure there is a diverse range of teaching and learning opportunities including hot topics, case studies and current affairs.
- A visibly diverse environment is created which values difference and raises aspiration.
- Flexible opportunities are offered which meet local employment and learning needs and enable all staff and learners to realise their potential.
- All staff are clear about standards and strategies to meet diverse customer, staff and student needs and are equipped to respond effectively and promote equality and diversity.
- All staff will undertake appropriate CPD activity to ensure their full understanding of equality and diversity policies, procedures and legislation is maintained.
- Our equality and diversity policy is shared with all staff including new members during induction.
- We will continue to promote equality and diversity through hot topics, case studies, team meetings, communication forums and CPD sessions where any changes will be communicated.
- We will work with employers to actively promote equality and diversity and positively influence the recruitment of employees and apprentices through a range of methods, including the employer handbook, information on our website, and sharing of positive case studies and through learner reviews, to ensure implementation throughout the period of the apprenticeship programme.

- Senior Managers discuss any equality and diversity issues or changes during weekly meetings and at the board level quarterly.
  - We continue to have an equality and diversity Champion that leads communicating updates on equality and diversity to our staff members.
  - Optimum Skills positively promote equality and diversity through case studies, hot topics, and marketing material.
  - We have a fair recruitment policy for new staff members and for Apprentice and learner recruitment ensuring equality of opportunity at all times.
- 4.1.2. Inclusiveness is central to all the decisions and actions of Optimum Skills staff. Staff are responsible for ensuring that they are aware of, and meet their statutory responsibilities. Apprentices and learners are made aware of and expected to behave in a way that is consistent with the company's Equality and Diversity policy. Individual breaches of the policy will be dealt with under the Company's Disciplinary Procedure.
- 4.1.3. The company will support individuals who have a justified complaint. Employers on initial engagement and through Client Review meetings are made aware of the Optimum Skills policy and their commitment to implementing good practices for Equality and Diversity.
- 4.1.4. The company believes a commitment to equality is more effectively met when it is embedded across a range of activities. The company will develop a clear set of equality and diversity measures to assess the impact of its policy and practice and benchmark company performance against comparable external outcomes.
- 4.1.5. Positive action measures will be used to improve any disadvantage experienced by individuals sharing a protected characteristic, therefore aiming to reduce under-representation in relation to activities or meeting their needs. We will ensure that when using positive action this meets the requirements of what is applicable by law.
- 4.1.6. The Head of Quality is responsible for monitoring this policy and will provide regular reports to the Directors as appropriate.

## 5. Position Statements

### **5.1. Optimum Skills**

- 5.1.1. Have a duty of care to ensure that learners, staff and employers in our charge are treated with respect and fairness to ensure all individuals have the opportunity to develop according to their individual needs. It is also important that our wider responsibilities are understood in relation to “equality and diversity” so that we know about the statutory regulations and the requirements of Ofsted.
- 5.1.2. Learning and employment should be promoted to ensure participation which is representative of the local, regional and national demographical data. Our learning environments should be non-discriminatory, challenging negative behaviours towards the protected characteristic groups.
- 5.1.3. Optimum Skills will:
- Work actively to create a professional, supportive and inclusive environment for all that enables full participation and success in learning and employment.
  - Ensure that people are not treated unfairly in recruitment, education, training and employment because of their personal circumstances.
  - Aim to identify and eliminate attitudes, practices and procedures that discriminate against people, by challenging behaviours which may cause distress/ harm and breach the Equality Act.
  - Take seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, learners, customers, suppliers, visitors, the public and any others in the course of the organisation’s work activities.
  - Ensure all employees should understand they, as well as their employer, can be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, customers, suppliers and the public.
  - Ensure such acts will be dealt with as misconduct under the organisation’s grievance and/or disciplinary procedures, and any appropriate action will be taken. Particularly serious complaints could amount to gross misconduct and lead to dismissal without notice.
  - Train develop and progress employees, to develop to their full potential, so their talents and resources can be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the organisation.
  - Monitor the make-up of the learners and employees in relation to age, gender, race, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and disability in encouraging equality and diversity, and in meeting the aims and commitments set out in the equality policy.

- Accept its responsibilities and is committed to making any reasonable adjustments that will promote equal access and opportunity for employees, learners and customers with disabilities, including specialist equipment, technology and different formats of information on request.
- Ensure that all potential and current employees have appropriate opportunities to disclose disability and/or learning difficulty throughout their time as an employee at the company.
- Promote fair and ethical employment opportunities and will not refuse staff specifically due to a disability and/or learning difficulty.
- Recognise the need to ensure tolerance to diverse beliefs and will promote inclusion in line with the Equality Act and actively promote British values.
- Not discriminate directly against anyone - that is, to treat them less favourably than others because of their protected characteristic in accordance with the Equality Act.
- Commit to promoting equality of opportunity and good race relations between persons of different groups and avoiding discrimination, whether direct or indirect.
- Actively support and promote educational achievement for people of all ages in line with the Equality Act.
- Encourage an openness of approach to all potential job applicants and learners.
- Provide transition guidelines to tailor to specific needs for gender reassignment / transitioning employees and learners.
- Provide support and encourage all hate-crime incidents to be reported. This includes religious or racial hatred, encouraging racial hatred and any form of violence or encouraging violence. We will not tolerate homophobic, biphobic, transphobic, racist or disablist hate incidents. All incidents should be reported if this occurs in the workplace, at any of our learning centres or off-site.

## **5.2. Ex-Offenders additional to the protected characteristics of the Equality Act (2010)**

- 5.2.1. Recognises the requirements of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (and any subsequent amendments thereto), in terms of the right of individuals seeking to gain employment with the company or seeking to join a company programme not to be questioned about offences which are spent.
- 5.2.2. Recognises that the Act sets education as an exemption to this, where education is the occupation.
- 5.2.3. Optimum skills will:



- Not discriminate against any individual seeking employment or enrolling on the grounds of previous offences, with the exception of circumstances that might put existing staff or learners in danger.
  - In the appointment/application process meet the requirements of the Act apart from where the exception in terms of education is applicable.
- 5.2.4. As an organisation using the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) to assess applicants' suitability for positions of trust. Optimum Skills Limited undertakes to treat all applicants for positions fairly. The company will not discriminate unfairly against any subject of a Disclosure on the basis of a conviction or other information revealed.
- 5.2.5. The company actively promotes equality of opportunity for the right mix of talent, skills and potential and welcomes applications from a wide range of candidates, including those with criminal records.

### **5.3. Individual Personal Characteristics additional to the protected characteristics of the Equality Act (2010)**

#### 5.3.1. Optimum skills will:

- Will work actively to create a supportive and inclusive environment for all, that enables full participation and success in employment and learning and will open up opportunities by actively combating discrimination in every area of company life.
- Recognises that people can be treated unfairly in terms of employment, education and training because of personal characteristics. The company aims to eradicate such discrimination.

## 6. Communication of this Policy

### **6.1. Staff Members**

- All staff members must read updates of the new policy and sign to say that they have written and understood the policy. This is supported by classroom CPD, and the completion of a Level 2 Award in Equality and Diversity, which all staff are required to complete.
- Equality and Diversity will formulate regular CPD, including utilising case studies, hot topics, and discussions with our Equality Champion.
- Leaders and Managers oversee Equality and Diversity concerns weekly, which is tabled at Senior Manager's Meetings. Equality and Diversity issues are also overseen by the Non-Executive Board quarterly.

### **6.2. Learners**

- Apprentices are provided with a learner handbook, detailing Equality and Diversity and what to do in the event of a concern.
- Apprenticeship teaching and learning embeds Equality and Diversity in every session, to ensure the apprentices have a solid understanding of the subject. This is through use of hot topics, case studies, theory and practice.

- We will be utilising mobile Apps to enhance communication with apprentices and to streamline guidance on Equality and Diversity.
- Optimum Skills equality posters are to be displayed in all classrooms to increase communication channels around what Equality and Diversity is, and whom to contact.

### **6.3. Employers**

- Client Relations Managers discuss our Equality and Diversity policy as part of the due diligence undertaken with employers.
- Tutors discuss Equality and Diversity at learner reviews to ensure their understanding is strong and that they are adhering to ensuring apprentices remain safe.
- Optimum Skills will share good practice with employers through newsletters and case studies on appropriate Equality and Diversity issues to improve their knowledge.
- Our Welfare Officer will introduce themselves to employers and provide contact details in the event that they may be concerned about Equality and Diversity.