



Coventry Independent
Advice Service

Equality and diversity policy

1. Introduction

The purpose of this policy is:

- to encourage an atmosphere within Coventry Independent Advice Service in which all staff respect people's equal worth and rights, and embrace the benefits of working in a diverse workforce.
- to promote fair and equal treatment for all employees, job applicants, trustees, volunteers, clients, suppliers and visitors, and to overcome barriers to fair treatment and equal participation.

Coventry Independent Advice Service recognises the positive value of diversity, promotes equality and challenges unfair discrimination. We recognise people with different backgrounds, skills, attitudes and experiences bring fresh ideas and perceptions, and we wish to encourage and harness these differences to make our services more relevant and approachable.

Our aim is that our workforce will be truly representative of all sections of society. Everyone should feel respected and valued and able to achieve their full potential.

Coventry Independent Advice Service will not discriminate or tolerate discriminatory behaviour on the grounds of race, colour, sex, gender identity, disability, nationality, national or ethnic origin, religion or belief, marital/partnership or family status, sexual orientation, age, pregnancy and maternity, social class, educational background, employment status, working pattern, trade union membership or any other irrelevant factor in any aspect of employment. All employees and job applicants are entitled to equality of opportunity and will be treated fairly and with respect. Selection for employment, transfer, training and access to benefits, facilities and services will be fair and equitable, and based solely on merit.

Equality and diversity are inextricably linked: we are all different or diverse and yet we all share a common, equal humanity.

- **Equality** is about us sharing a common humanity which makes us equal in worth and rights. In promoting equality, we focus on treating people fairly according to need, respecting them, their equal rights, dignity and worth.
- **Diversity** is about recognising, valuing, taking into account and making positive use of the differences which people have. People are different and diverse for all sorts of reasons.

In managing equality and diversity, we promote good practice, and identify and challenge inequality and discrimination to ensure that everyone can be themselves and fulfil their potential.

2. Scope

This policy relates to all aspects of employment at Coventry Independent Advice Service. It therefore covers the advertisement of posts, recruitment and selection, individual standards of behaviour, training and development, appraisal, pay and leaving the organisation.

The principles also apply to all dealings with clients, suppliers, volunteers, partners, supporters and visitors, and are always considered when developing other policies.

3. Legal obligations

In valuing diversity, Coventry Independent Advice Service is committed to go beyond the legal minimum regarding equality. However, current and future equality legislation and associated codes of practice are considered, not limited to the following:

- Equal Pay Act 1970
- Employment Equal Treatment Framework Directive 2000 (as amended)
- Civil Partnership Act 2004 (as amended)
- Equality Act 2010

The above legislation serves to protect individuals against direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, associative discrimination, perceptive discrimination, harassment (including bullying) and victimisation because of a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 include age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity.

- **Direct discrimination** is treating a person less favourably because they have or are thought to have (see perceptive discrimination below), or because they associate with someone who has, a protected characteristic (see associative discrimination below).
- **Associative discrimination** is direct discrimination against someone because they associate with another person who possesses a protected characteristic.
- **Perceptive discrimination** is direct discrimination against someone because others think they possess a protected characteristic. It applies even if the person does not actually possess that characteristic.
- **Indirect discrimination** is applying a condition, rule, policy or practice equally to all people but which has the effect of disadvantaging people who share a protected characteristic. Indirect discrimination can be justified if it is a proportionate (fair and reasonable) means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- **Harassment** is unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

- **Bullying** is a form of harassment, usually persistent, and often related to an abuse of power or the use of unfair sanctions.
- **Victimisation** is treating a person less favourably because they have made or supported a complaint of discrimination and asserted their rights under this policy or equality legislation, or because they are suspected of doing so.

Coventry Independent Advice Service is committed to extending the principles which underpin the above legislation to all staff regardless of any personal characteristic.

4. Responsibilities

All staff

At all levels of the organisation are expected to have read and understood this policy, to ensure they behave in accordance with its principles, to encourage the same level of behaviour in colleagues and immediately report any breaches witnessed, whenever it is reasonable for them to do so.

All managers

Are responsible for promoting this policy and ensuring it is understood and complied with by all staff in their area, dealing with breaches and complaints (whether reported or not) seriously, speedily, sensitively and confidentially and contributing ideas for the advancement of diversity principles within the organisation. Managers are expected to be proactive in identifying circumstances in which elements of the policy can benefit individual members of staff, and encourage and support staff in making use of such benefits.

Our Trustees

Are expected to have read and understood this policy, to ensure they behave in accordance with its principles and to encourage their adoption throughout the organisation.

Director of Service

Is responsible for implementing, reviewing, monitoring the effectiveness of and providing advice on this policy, encouraging the adoption of its principles throughout the organisation, organising training and education, and ensuring complaints are adequately investigated. The Director of Service has overall responsibility for this policy and reports to the Trustee Board.

5. Implementing the policy

Communication and training

The policy will be covered in all staff induction events, and ongoing training in equality and diversity will be available to support staff in understanding their rights and responsibilities under this policy. Equality and diversity issues will also be regularly covered in team meetings/briefings.

Conduct and general standards of behaviour

All staff are expected to always conduct themselves in a professional and considerate manner. Coventry Independent Advice Service will not tolerate behaviour such as:

- threats
- physical violence
- shouting
- swearing at others
- rudeness
- isolating, ignoring or refusing to work with certain people
- telling offensive jokes or name calling
- the display of offensive material such as pornography or sexist/racist cartoons, or the distribution of such material via e-mail/text message or any other format.

Coventry Independent Advice Service encourages staff to resolve misunderstandings and problems informally wherever possible, depending on the circumstances. However, whether dealt with informally or formally, it is important for staff who may have caused offence to understand that it is no defence to say that they did not intend to do so, or to blame individuals for being over sensitive. It is the impact of the behaviour, rather than the intent, that counts, and that should shape the solution found both to the immediate problem and to preventing further similar problems in the future.

Recruitment and selection

Coventry Independent Advice Service actively welcomes and encourages applications from people of all backgrounds. All individuals involved in recruitment and selection will be suitably trained/briefed to ensure that the recruitment and selection policy is adhered to.

Training and development

Coventry Independent Advice Service will ensure that all employees are encouraged to achieve their full potential. Selection for all training and career development opportunities will be purely based on merit. Appraisals of performance will be conducted objectively and on time.

Positive action

Coventry Independent Advice Service is aware that some people face barriers to participating in the workplace on an equal footing with others and will encourage, through positive action, a better representation of the diverse communities served by Coventry Independent Advice Service at all levels of the organisation. This may involve offering development opportunities to certain groups of staff to enable them to compete more equally with others and address under-representation in the workforce, for example, leadership/management development opportunities for groups under-represented in senior roles.

Positive action initiatives will operate alongside initiatives to raise the awareness of managers and other staff of potential barriers to equality, including where relevant their own attitudes and actions.

Positive action involves providing training or encouragement to groups in areas of work where they are under-represented. It is not the same as positive discrimination which is unlawful.

Meeting individual needs

Coventry Independent Advice Service will do its utmost to meet the needs of individuals at work, for example:

- caring and domestic responsibilities (see separate guidelines);
- working patterns - wherever possible training courses and meetings will be planned to allow attendance by staff working non-standard hours/working patterns;
- disability - reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to remove barriers and enable disabled staff to carry out their roles; and
- religious practices - time off and suitable facilities for prayer will be provided wherever possible and staff have the right to take annual leave to celebrate religious festivals (see separate guidelines).

6. Breaches of the policy

Where genuine misunderstandings or minor breaches have occurred due to a lack of awareness of equality and diversity principles, some form of education or training will usually be appropriate. Other breaches (and minor breaches that are repeated or unresolved despite education, training or other interventions) will be treated as misconduct and may lead to disciplinary proceedings.

It is important for staff to know that where legal requirements are contravened, both the organisation and the employee concerned may be liable to legal proceedings and risk having unlimited damages awarded against them.

7. Complaints

If any member of staff feels that this policy has been breached they should speak to their manager in the first instance, who has the responsibility of ensuring that any such issues are investigated and dealt with appropriately. If the line manager is the individual about whom the member of staff has a concern, they should speak with the Director of Service or a member of the Trustee Board.

Formal complaints regarding personal detriment can be made under the Grievance Procedure. Matters of serious concern, which are of public interest, should be raised using the Whistleblowing (protected disclosure) policy.

Concerns raised will be taken seriously and dealt with speedily and confidentially. Staff can feel confident that they can make a complaint in good faith without fear of detrimental treatment, reprisal or victimisation.

8. Monitoring, review and consultation

The effectiveness of this policy will be monitored and reviewed annually to ensure it remains current using:

- statistics relating to all recruitment and selection/promotion exercises, staff in post, training, discipline and staff exits broken down by gender, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and age.
- staff survey information and analysis.