

<b><u>Equality and Diversity policy</u></b>	
<b>Date this procedure reviewed</b>	<b>January 2024</b>
<b>Next review</b>	<b>January 2026</b>

**Why We Have an Equity and Diversity Policy?**

Volunteer Action (VA) promotes the wellbeing of all older people and those with mobility limitations. It recognises that every person is an individual with different needs, preferences and abilities. It aims to reflect this diversity in everything it does, including making its services inclusive and accessible to people from all sections of the community. VA believes that harnessing different life experiences, attributes and contributions from staff, volunteers and service users will make VA a more effective and inclusive organisation and a better place to work.

This policy sets out our approach to equal opportunities and the avoidance of discrimination in all we do. It applies to staff, volunteers and members.

The Equality Act 2010 is integral to this policy.  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

**The Policy Statement**

VA has a commitment to diversity, which is about:

- Recognising and valuing difference
- Recognising and seeking to redress inequity and disadvantage in access to its services
- Treating all in a fair, open and honest manner
- Recognising the right of volunteers, employees and members to be treated with dignity and respect

In line with legislation, VA will not tolerate less favourable treatment on the grounds of sex, gender, gender reassignment, age, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, disability, marital/civil partnership status, sexual orientation, pregnancy or maternity, responsibility for dependents, trade union or political activities, criminal record, place of residence, religion, faith or other beliefs, health status or any other reason which cannot be shown to be justified. VA will never use cultural practices as a justification for, or to ignore an issue of, safeguarding.

VA is primarily committed to the welfare of the people we support and to maintaining their individual dignity and their value to society. VA is also committed to a policy of Equity and Diversity in service delivery and in employment practices and will not accept discrimination in its work.

This commitment includes ensuring staff and volunteers conduct themselves in a way to help the organisation provide equal opportunities both in employment and service, and prevent bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination.

All staff and volunteers 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, volunteers, customers, suppliers and the public.

**Provision of Services**

Users of our services and those who take part in our activities will be informed that VA is committed to an Equity and Diversity Policy so that:

- They will know a policy exists and a copy is available so as to guide all members of the organisation and others to share the commitment and code of practice of Equity and Diversity.
- All who come into contact with VA will know the standards that we are trying to achieve and have the opportunity to assist us in trying to achieve them.
- They will know they have the right to complain, if they feel these standards are not being adhered to or are dissatisfied with the service provided to them.

VA provides services to all communities including groups facing disadvantage and discrimination. Where appropriate we will try to provide information in English and/or give help to find translation services

### **Discrimination**

VA will not unlawfully discriminate against or harass other people including current and former employees, job applicants, volunteers, clients, service users, customers, suppliers and visitors. This applies in the workplace, outside the workplace (when dealing with customers, suppliers or other work-related contacts), and on work-related trips or events including social events.

The following forms of discrimination are prohibited under this policy and are unlawful:

- (a) **Direct discrimination:** treating someone less favourably because of a Protected Characteristic. For example, rejecting a job applicant because of their religious views or because they might be gay.
- (b) **Indirect discrimination:** a provision, criterion or practice that applies to everyone but adversely affects people with a particular Protected Characteristic more than others, and is not justified. For example, requiring a job to be done full-time rather than part-time would adversely affect women because they generally have greater childcare commitments than men. Such a requirement would be discriminatory unless it can be justified.
- (c) **Harassment:** this includes sexual harassment and other unwanted conduct related to a Protected Characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.
- (d) **Victimisation:** retaliation against someone who has complained or has supported someone else's complaint about discrimination or harassment.
- (e) **Disability discrimination:** this 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.

### **Recruitment and Selection**

VA will ensure that recruitment practices fulfil the requirement of the Equity and Diversity policy. Where possible, vacancies will be advertised to a diverse section of the labour market. All posts will have a job description and person specification, which will contain essential and desirable skills, qualifications and experience. Person specifications will only contain details which are required. Job applicants will not be asked questions which might suggest an intention to discriminate on grounds of a Protected Characteristic.

Shortlisting will be done by more than one person if possible. The format for interview will be agreed before it takes place and will remain constant for all interviews for the position.



Every effort will be made to make provision for staff and volunteers with a disability through reasonable adaptations.

All staff and trustees involved in recruitment and selection will be aware of this policy and adhere to it at all times. All applicants for posts will be treated strictly on merit, against objective criteria that avoid discrimination. As an exception, posts targeted at specific groups of people will be exempted, as allowed by legislation.

An appointed person will be responsible for vetting, in confidence, applicants for sensitive posts; this may include Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. Reasons for the decision to appoint, or not, will be noted and kept for at least six months.

### **Part-time and fixed-term work**

Part-time and fixed-term employees will be treated the same as comparable full-time or permanent employees and enjoy no less favourable terms and conditions (on a pro-rata basis where appropriate), unless different treatment is justified.

### **Disabilities**

If an employee is disabled or becomes disabled, they are encouraged to talk about their condition so that reasonable adjustments or support may be considered as appropriate.

### **Training and Development**

The Board of Trustees, staff and volunteers need to recognise and fulfil their personal role in making VA a genuinely inviting and inclusive organisation. VA will ensure that all staff and volunteers know about the Equity and Diversity policy and their responsibilities within it, by including it within Induction Training, and ensuring it has a high profile within our internal communications and practices.

### **Responsibilities**

The Board of Trustees has the ultimate responsibility to provide, implement and review this policy. It is the responsibility of trustees, staff and volunteers to support the policy by ensuring that VA's activities promote equity and diversity. The manager holds the day to day responsibility for ensuring that the policy is implemented and, in the first instance, for dealing with or taking action on disciplinary offences.

### **Breaches of this policy**

VA takes seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, volunteers, customers, suppliers, visitors, the public and any others in the course of the organisation's work activities.

We take a strict approach to breaches of this policy, which will be dealt with in accordance with our Disciplinary Procedure. Serious cases of deliberate discrimination may amount to gross misconduct resulting in dismissal without notice.

If an employee believes that they have suffered discrimination the matter can be raised through VA's Grievance Procedure. Complaints will be treated in confidence and investigated as appropriate.

Employees must not be victimised or retaliated against for complaining about discrimination. However, making a false allegation deliberately and in bad faith will be treated as misconduct and dealt with under our Disciplinary Procedure.

