

<u>Equality and Diversity policy</u>	
Date this procedure reviewed Next review	May 2026 January 2028

Policy Statement and Purpose

Volunteer Action (VA/we) is committed to promoting the wellbeing of people over the age of 65 or those who meet our eligibility criteria. We recognise every person as an individual with unique needs and abilities, and we strive to ensure our services are inclusive, accessible, and welcoming to all sections of the community.

We value the diverse life experiences and perspectives of our team, believing that this diversity strengthens our services and makes VA a better place to work and volunteer. This policy outlines our commitment to equity, equal opportunities, and the prevention of discrimination in everything we do.

The Equality Act 2010 is integral to this policy.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/equality-act-2010-guidance>

Legal Framework and Scope

This policy applies to all staff, volunteers, trustees, and members.

In accordance with UK legislation and our own values, VA will not tolerate less favourable treatment based on:

- **Protected Characteristics (UK Law):** Age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- **Additional VA Protections:** Responsibility for dependents, health status, criminal record, place of residence, and trade union or political activities.

Prohibited Conduct

VA strictly prohibits the following forms of discrimination:

- **Direct Discrimination:** Treating someone less favourably because of a Protected Characteristic.
- **Indirect Discrimination:** Applying a rule or practice that disadvantages a specific group without objective justification.
- **Harassment:** Unwanted conduct that violates dignity or creates an intimidating or offensive environment.

- **Victimisation:** Retaliation against someone for making or supporting a complaint of discrimination.
- **Disability Discrimination:** Including the failure to make reasonable adjustments to remove barriers for disabled individuals.

Service Provision

All service users will be informed of this policy to ensure they know:

- The standards of inclusive service they should expect.
- Their right to complain if they feel these standards are not met.
- That VA proactively provides services to groups facing disadvantage and discrimination.

Recruitment and Employment

- **Fair Selection:** Vacancies will be advertised widely where possible, and all applicants will be treated strictly on merit against objective criteria. This includes internal and external recruitment.
- **Standardised Interviews:** Interview formats will remain constant for all candidates for a specific position.
- **Parity:** Part-time and fixed-term employees will enjoy the same terms and conditions as full-time staff on a pro-rata basis.

Disability and Reasonable Adjustments

VA is committed to treating disabled people with dignity and fairness. We will take proactive steps to ensure our workplaces and services are accessible. If a staff member or volunteer becomes disabled during their time with VA, we will work with them to identify reasonable adjustments to enable them to continue in their role.

Responsibilities

- **Board of Trustees:** Holds ultimate responsibility for the provision, implementation, and review of this policy.
- **Chief Executive:** Holds day-to-day responsibility for implementation and handling disciplinary matters. (unless involving the CE, when this reverts to the Chair of the trustees)
- **Individual Responsibility:** Every staff member and volunteer can be held legally responsible for acts of unlawful discrimination or harassment committed during their work.

Breaches of Policy

Complaints will be handled sensitively and confidentially via VA's Complaints, Grievance or Disciplinary Procedures. Serious cases of deliberate discrimination may be classified as gross misconduct, potentially resulting in dismissal.