

# Equal Opportunities Policy Statement

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## Translations and other formats

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Date of last review	
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# Equal Opportunities Policy Statement

## 1 Introduction

This statement sets out in summary form how we promote equality of opportunity and serves as a sign-posting tool for anyone coming into contact with the Commission.

## 2 Audience

2.1 This policy is aimed at all our stakeholders including:

- voters across the United Kingdom
- political parties and their agents
- electoral administrators
- external contractors
- job applicants
- our employees (including permanent, fixed term, part-time, agency staff and consultants)
- our board

## 3 Compliance with equality legislation

3.1 The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. We regulate party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections. We work to support a healthy democracy, where elections and referendums are based on our principles of trust, participation, and no undue influence.

3.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires us to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not. The protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion, sex, and sexual orientation. We must also comply with part 5 of the Act which protects against discrimination in employment and other work-related situations. The Equality Act applies to England, Scotland and Wales.

3.3 Under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 we must have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- people of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation
- men and women generally
- people with a disability and people without
- people with dependants and people without

3.4 The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 as amended, makes it unlawful to discriminate on the grounds of religious belief and/or political opinion in employment. The 1998 Order was amended by the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003 to meet the requirements of the EU Framework Directive for Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation.

### **The Commission's Single Equality Scheme**

3.5 As a matter of best practice we follow the provisions of a variety of secondary equality legislation to support the Equality Act in England, Scotland and Wales, as well as meeting our equality duties in Northern Ireland. Our [Single Equality Scheme](#) sets out how we aim to achieve this.

### **Our equality impact assessments (EIAs) and equality updates**

3.6 EIAs enable us to consider the impact of our policies on different groups. We use a toolkit to ensure our EIAs consider the scope and relevance of all our policies in relation to equality and we base our policy decisions on evidence. We consult appropriately and publish [summaries of our EIAs](#) on our website. We also publish regular equality updates.

### **Promoting high standards in elections and voter registration**

3.7 The Commission produces statutory [performance standards](#) for electoral administration staff in local authorities to deliver elections and electoral registration services. A key aim of setting standards is to ensure that everyone who is eligible to vote and participate in elections in the UK is able to do so. There is a strong focus on promoting good practice and ensuring access for all protected groups. Our registration and voter awareness campaigns reflect this commitment and we are keen to ensure that the media we use are widely accessible and our campaign images representative of our audience.

### **Ensuring the transparency of party and election finance, with high levels of compliance**

3.8 The Commission's enforcement powers are set out in statute and supported by our [enforcement policy](#), which is designed to regulate in a way that is effective, proportionate and fair, in line with the principles of good regulation. A key objective of our enforcement activity is to ensure the transparency and integrity of party and election finance that voters expect.

### **Access to our services**

3.9 We have a number of policies that aim to ensure access to our services.

3.10 Through our [FOI publication scheme](#) we provide information in response to requests under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The Scheme ensures that a large amount of information is readily available and also informs the public of the extent of information. The scheme is supported with a procedure which ensures the widest possible access.

3.11 Our [complaints procedure](#) sets out how we process complaints about our services. Accessible arrangements for complaints are set out on our website and in our publications.

3.12 We aim to ensure that [our consultations](#) are accessible. This includes good language practice and how to ensure that all our stakeholders can participate.

3.13 We aim to make our written materials widely accessible and our **alternative formats policy** sets out how we deliver our written information to anyone who cannot access our mainstream format. All requests are considered and there is a dedicated 'phone line and textphone. We also follow guidelines to deliver information through our information line in accessible formats.

3.14 Our [Welsh Language Scheme](#) sets out how we deliver our services in Wales. The scheme is supported with Welsh Language training, which is given to staff with responsibility for dealing with our stakeholders in Wales.

### **Procurement and partnership working**

3.15 All organisations working with us must comply with equality law and our procurement procedures make this clear from the start. We ask prospective contractors to show us how they will meet our equality and diversity needs and how they deliver on equality as an employer and through existing contracts.

### **Promoting equality of opportunity as an employer**

3.16 We are committed to ensuring access for all to opportunities for employment, promotion, development and training. We promote a positive working environment where all employees are entitled to dignity, respect and equality of treatment. We monitor the composition of our workforce and the application of all our policies in relation to equality and diversity.

3.17 We have developed a number of policies and procedures which aim to support employee health, safety and wellbeing as well as promoting work-life balance and fostering an open, supportive and democratic culture.

### **Monitoring and recruitment**

3.18 We advertise vacancies in accessible media and monitor our recruitment selection, which is based on essential criteria. We deliver training to staff involved in recruitment and we use the 'two ticks' symbol, which ensures that

anyone with a disability meeting the criteria will be interviewed. Equally, we monitor our leavers and conduct regular confidential staff surveys and exit interviews to ensure we are accommodating the needs of all our staff.

3.19 We conduct equal pay reviews periodically and we evaluate job roles by means of a 'points-factor' system. This procedure is free of gender and other bias, as are promotion and bonus payments procedures.

### **Accessible working**

3.20 We make reasonable adjustments to ensure staff and key stakeholders with disabilities are not disadvantaged.

3.21 Staff and new job applicants with disabilities are encouraged to advise us of adjustments that might assist them in the performance of their duties.

3.22 We consider requests for occasional home working and have procedures in place for more formal arrangements. There is no limit on the number of days that disabled employees can work from home, subject to operational requirements, such as the occasional presence in the office, which may be necessary in specific circumstances.

### **Work-life balance**

3.33 In addition to our flexible working hours scheme, we offer parental leave and enhanced leave for maternity, paternity and adoption. Our special leave policy also caters for a wide range of circumstances.

3.34 Our childcare voucher scheme includes access to a free confidential helpline for working parents, which offers information and support on a wide range of parenting and family issues including care of dependents.

### **Wellbeing**

3.35 We seek to identify all workplace stressors and conduct risk assessments to eliminate or control the risks for stress. We consult with our trade union representatives accordingly. Appropriate training and support is provided for managers, staff, and safety representatives to help identify, understand and combat the causes of work-related stress.

3.36 We provide an Employee Assistance Programme which offers information and support including counselling on a wide range of issues.

3.37 We are committed to providing financial support through our enhanced sick pay scheme for all employees irrespective of their length of service who, due to sickness, are unable to come to work. Sick pay for part time and fixed term working is based on pro rata salary calculations for hours worked and length of contract.

3.38 Equally, we are committed to encouraging and supporting staff in achieving an effective return to work upon recovery and we make all reasonable adjustments to working arrangements towards accomplishing this. Our procedures for managing long and short term sick leave are set out in our sickness absence management policy.

## **Conduct**

3.39 The Commission has a range of policies and procedures that deal with behaviour at work, including a code of conduct, grievance, discipline and capability procedures, which are designed to ensure that no employee is inadvertently disadvantaged in proceedings. Our conduct policies set out clearly our zero tolerance approach to discriminatory and bullying behaviours.

3.40 We expect all our staff to comply with our dignity at work policy which sets out arrangements for dealing with all forms of harassment and guarantees a prompt response to concerns raised. The policy contains information for managers about harassment procedures, how to report it and getting additional help. We deliver staff training to ensure all are aware of our zero tolerance approach and we promote best possible practice to guard against workplace bullying.

3.41 Our whistleblowing policy provides a procedure to ensure concerns about malpractice or wrong doings can be raised confidently without fear. All staff personal information is handled confidentially and not divulged without explicit permission.

## **Staff development**

3.42 We are committed to the continuous development of all our staff and to ensuring that our permanent and fixed term colleagues have access to learning opportunities. Our learning and development policy sets out how we achieve this.

3.43 Our learning and development programme covers good employment practice, dignity at work and equality of opportunity. Our induction programme includes equality and diversity training which all new staff are required to complete. We also run regular equality training sessions for all staff and detailed equality impact assessment training for policy owners. Welsh Language training is given to all staff working with our stakeholders in Wales.

## **4 Equalities impact assessment**

4.1 Completed in July 2012. A screening of the policy found the potential negative impact of the policy on protected groups to be low. The policy statement sets out the measures in place to ensure that we do not discriminate on the basis of all protected groups under the Equality Act 2010, Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and Welsh language legislation.