Equal Opportunities Policy

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1. Our commitment

We are committed to providing equal employment opportunities and avoiding unlawful discrimination. This policy is intended to assist putting this commitment into practice.

We are also committed to ensuring that the work environment is free of harassment and bullying, and that everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Please see our Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy.

2. The Law

It is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment or employment because of a 'Protected Characteristic'. The Equality Act 2010 defines the Protected Characteristics as being age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, maternity, race (which includes colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origins), sexual orientation, religion or belief.

Discrimination after employment may also be unlawful. For example, refusing to give a reference for a reason related to one of the Protected Characteristics.

It is also unlawful to discriminate against or harass a member of the public or service user in the provision of services or goods, or to fail to make reasonable adjustments.

3. Types of unlawful discrimination

- **Direct discrimination** is where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a Protected Characteristic. The basic proposition is that such discrimination cannot be justified but in the limited case of age discrimination, such discrimination may be lawful if there is an occupational requirement which is core to a job role and a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- **Indirect discrimination** means putting in place, a rule or policy or way of doing things that may on the face of it appear neutral but it has a worse impact on someone with a Protected Characteristic than someone without one, when this cannot be objectively justified.
- **Harassment** is unwanted behaviour related to a Protected Characteristic (other than marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity) which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or which creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. It does not matter if this effect was intended by the person responsible for the conduct.
- **Associative discrimination** is where the individual treated less favourably does not have a Protected Characteristic, but is discriminated against because of their association with someone who does (for example the parent of a disabled child).
- **Perceptive discrimination** is where the individual discriminated against or harassed does not have a Protected Characteristic, but they are perceived to have a Protected Characteristic.
- **Third-party harassment** occurs when an employee is harassed by third parties such as service users, due to a Protected Characteristic.
- **Victimisation** is treating someone unfavourably because they have taken some form of action relating to the Equality Act 2010. For example, because they have supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because they are suspected of doing so. However, an employee is not protected from victimisation if they acted maliciously, or if they made or supported an untrue complaint.
- **Failure to make reasonable adjustments** occurs when a rule or policy or way of doing things has a worse impact on someone with a Protected Characteristic compared with someone who does not have that Protected Characteristic and the employer has failed to make a reasonable adjustment.

4. Reasonable adjustments

A 'reasonable adjustment' is a change to remove or reduce the effect of:

- an employee's disability so they can do their job
- a job applicant's disability when applying for a job

What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances of each case, but adjustments could be to:

- the workplace (making changes to overcome barriers created by the physical workplace)
- the ways things are done (where the disabled worker is put at a substantial disadvantage by a provision, criterion or practice).
- Providing extra equipment or another worker or support worker to assist the employee or job applicant

When deciding whether an adjustment is reasonable we will consider:

- how effective the change will be in avoiding the disadvantage the employee would otherwise experience
- its practicality
- the cost
- our resources and size
- the availability of financial support
- The availability of Government advice and support including Access To Work

The overall aim will be, as far as possible, to remove or reduce any substantial disadvantage faced by a staff member or job applicant which would not be faced by a non-disabled person.

5. Recruitment

Our recruitment practices aim to attract applicants with the knowledge, skills and experience required for the job role, irrespective of an applicant's background. A diverse staff team supports us to better understand the needs of a diverse range of stakeholders.

We may therefore take positive action as permitted by the law/Equalities Act 2010 to improve our diversity amongst our volunteers or staff. We also take steps to anonymise applications before shortlisting and we ask interviewees whether any adjustments are needed to participate in the selection process.

Soundabout signed the Show The Salary pledge and therefore is committed to:

- Never ask candidates for current/previous salary
- Never include a degree unless it's truly essential

Soundabout is also a Living Wage and Disability Confident Employer. Please see our Recruitment process for more details.

6. Equal opportunities in employment

We will avoid unlawful discrimination in all aspects of employment including recruitment, promotion, opportunities for training, pay and benefits, discipline and selection for redundancy. Person specifications will avoid any unnecessary requirements (those unrelated to effective performance) that may otherwise have deterred applicants.

We will base decisions on objective criteria. We will make reasonable adjustments in recruitment as well as in day-to-day employment.

If you are disabled or become disabled, we encourage you to tell us about your disability, so that we can consider what reasonable adjustments or support may be appropriate which would help you perform your duties. We may need to seek medical advice to fully understand your disability and whether a proposed adjustment is reasonable.

We will continue to monitor the physical features of our premises and where needed; we will take proportionate steps to improve access for disabled workers.

7. Service users, suppliers and others

We will not discriminate unlawfully against service users using or seeking to use the services we provide.

If you are bullied or harassed by a service user, suppliers, contractor, visitor or others, or if you witness someone else being bullied of harassed, you are asked to report this to your line manager who will take appropriate action.

8. Training

We will provide information and guidance to those involved in recruitment or other decision-making where equal opportunities issues are likely to arise to help them understand their responsibilities and to avoid the risk of discrimination.

9. Your responsibilities

All staff are responsible for supporting the organisation in meeting its commitment and avoiding unlawful discrimination. If you experience a level or discomfort or disagreement with something that happens when you are at work, you are encouraged to bring it to the attention of a manager or someone in authority.

It is possible that others are not aware or have not considered the impact of their actions, have not understood our policy, or possibly our practices need to be updated.

If you believe that you have been discriminated against you should report this to your line manager or the Chief Executive under the grievance procedure. If your complaint involves bullying or harassment, please refer to the grievance procedure and anti-bullying and harassment policy.

We take any complaint seriously and you will not be penalised for raising a grievance, even if your grievance is not upheld, unless your complaint is both without basis and made in bad faith.

If you witness what you believe to be discrimination you should report this to your line manager or the chief executive as soon as possible.

Employees can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the organisation for any act of unlawful discrimination. Employees who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence.

Acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation against employees or customers are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under our disciplinary procedure. Discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation may constitute gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal without notice.

10. Monitoring and review

This policy will be monitored periodically to judge its effectiveness and will be updated in accordance with changes in the law. We will report to the board of trustees on any actions or activities undertaken to improve equality of opportunity.

Any information provided by job applicants and employees for monitoring purposes will be used only for these purposes and will be dealt with in accordance with the data protection legislation.

	Date	Completed by
First Written	**September 2016**	**Jo Colton**
Updated	**23/2/2021**	**Philippa Higginbottom**
Next review date	**27/04/2022**	**Kathryn Jennings**
Revised	**March 2023**	**Maryse Degbegni**
Trustee Approval	**May 2023**	**Emily Nunns**
Next review date	**July 2026**	**Narrow Quay**

Appendix A: Equality Act 2010 - Explanation of the Protected Characteristics

It is against the law to discriminate against someone because of the following Protected Characteristics:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

You are protected under the Equality Act 2010 from these types of discrimination.

Age	A person belonging to a particular age (for example 32 year olds) or range of ages (for example 18 to 30 year olds).
Disability	A person with a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on their ability to do normal daily activities
Gender reassignment	The process of transitioning from one gender to another.
Marriage and civil partnership	Marriage is a union between a man and a woman or between a same-sex couple. Civil partners must not be treated less favourably than married couples (except where permitted by the Equality Act).
Pregnancy and maternity	Pregnancy is the condition of being pregnant or expecting a baby. Maternity refers to the period after the birth, and is linked to maternity leave in the employment context. In the non-work context, protection against maternity discrimination is for 26 weeks after giving birth, and this includes treating a woman unfavourably because she is breastfeeding.
Race	Refers to the Protected Characteristic of race. It refers to a group of people defined by their race, colour, and nationality (including citizenship) ethnic or national origins.
Religion and belief	Religion refers to any religion, including a lack of religion. Belief refers to any religious or philosophical belief and includes a lack of belief. Generally, a belief should affect your life choices or the way you live for it to be included in the definition.
Sex	A man or a woman.
Sexual orientation	Whether a person's sexual attraction is towards their own sex, the opposite sex or to both sexes.

Source: Equality and Human Rights Commission: www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics