



Northern Ireland

Public Services

Ombudsman

Equal Opportunities Policy

March 2022

1. Statement of Policy

1.1 The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) is committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity for all.

1.2 It is NIPSO's policy to provide equality of opportunity to all employees irrespective of:

- Sex, including pregnancy or maternity
- Gender reassignment
- Marital or civil partnership status
- Having or not having dependants
- Religious belief or similar philosophical belief
- Political opinion
- Disability
- Age
- Race, ethnic origin, colour or nationality
- Sexual orientation
- Trade Union membership or non-membership
- Criminal convictions

1.3 NIPSO is opposed to all forms of discrimination. All staff, irrespective of the nature of their employment status, and job applicants (actual or potential) will be treated fairly and will not be discriminated against on any of the above grounds. Decisions about recruitment and selection, promotion, training or any other benefit will be made fairly and reasonably and without unlawful discrimination.

1.4 We will also endeavour to ensure that our workplace and our employment policies and practices do not unreasonably exclude or disadvantage those of our job applicants and employees who have disabilities. To this end NIPSO will embrace positively our legal obligation to make reasonable adjustments for persons with disabilities and will take appropriate steps to ensure we do not permit unlawful discrimination on the grounds of disability.

1.5 NIPSO recognises that the provision of equal opportunities in the workplace is good management practice; it also makes sound business sense. NIPSO aims to ensure that staff resources are fully utilised to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation.

2. Scope of Policy

2.1 This Equal Opportunities Policy applies to all those who work for or apply to work for NIPSO.

3. Equality Commitments

3.1 NIPSO is committed to:

- Promoting equal opportunities for all employees;
- Preventing occurrences of direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Promoting a good and harmonious working environment where all persons are treated with dignity and respect;
- Fulfilling all legal obligations under the relevant Equality legislation and associated Codes of Practice;
- Complying with this Equal Opportunities Policy and associated policies.
- Taking lawful positive/affirmative action where necessary and appropriate;
- Treating all breaches of this Equal Opportunities Policy as misconduct which may lead to disciplinary action.

4. Implementation

4.1 The Ombudsman has overall specific responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy. The Senior Management Team and Line Managers also have personal responsibility to set an example in relation to their actions and provide leadership on adherence to the policy and promoting equal opportunities. All staff are expected to abide by the policy and help maintain a culture of equality.

4.2 In order to implement this policy, NIPSO will ensure that:

- The policy is communicated to all staff, for example through induction training, management training, availability on shared network locations and displayed on notice boards;
- All job applicants will be made aware of this policy;
- Line managers are aware of their responsibilities through appropriate and regular training;
- Appropriate training and guidance will be provided, including training on equal opportunities policy and good HR practice;
- Those involved in assessing candidates for recruitment or promotion will be trained in non-discriminatory recruitment and selection techniques;
- Specific and appropriate duties are incorporated in respect of implementing the Equal Opportunities Policy into job descriptions and performance objectives for staff;
- Consultation will take place on the implementation of this policy and any amendments to practice.

5. Affirmative Action

5.1 Where appropriate, lawful positive action measures such as special encouragement in advertisements or special training will be developed. These measures are appropriate in

certain circumstances, for example where there is an under-representation of a particular protected group of staff in specific areas of work.

6. Outside The Workplace

- 6.1 Whilst NIPSO's principal concern is to ensure that harassment does not occur in the workplace, employees are also expected to adhere to this policy when representing NIPSO at events or social functions whether organised by NIPSO or other organisations.
- 6.2 Any breach of the equal opportunities policy in these circumstances will be treated seriously by NIPSO.

7. Monitoring and Review

- 7.1 NIPSO has established appropriate information and monitoring systems to assist with the effective implementation of this Equal Opportunities Policy. This includes the monitoring of workforce composition and reviews required by Article 55 of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 and the Fair Employment (Monitoring) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 (as amended).
- 7.2 The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed periodically and action taken as necessary and when required.

8. Complaints

- 8.1 Staff who believe that they have suffered any form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are entitled to raise the matter through the agreed procedures (see Dignity at Work or Grievance Policy). These policies are available on shared network locations or by contacting HR. All complaints of discrimination or harassment will be dealt with sensitively, confidentially, promptly and rigorously.
- 8.2 Our internal complaints procedures do not replace or detract from the right of aggrieved staff to pursue complaints to an Industrial Tribunal or the Fair Employment Tribunal under the following anti-discrimination legislation:
 - The Equal Pay Act (Northern Ireland) 1970, as amended;
 - The Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, as amended;
 - The Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999;
 - The Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended;
 - The Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, as amended;
 - The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2003;
 - The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998, as amended;
 - The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006.

- 8.3 Every effort will be made to ensure that employees making complaints will not be victimised. Victimisation occurs when someone is treated less favourably because they have previously taken action in relation to discrimination, have assisted or been involved in action taken by someone else in relation to discrimination.
- 8.4 Any complaint of victimisation will be dealt with sensitively, confidentially, promptly and rigorously. Victimisation will result in appropriate disciplinary action, including dismissal where warranted.

If you have any concerns regarding any aspect of this policy please contact the HR Advisor or Line Manager