

Equality, diversity and inclusion

Introduction and commitment

MS-UK is committed to creating and promoting an equal, diverse and inclusive workplace for all employees and volunteers and anyone using our services, regardless of identity, background and circumstance. Everyone deserves the opportunity to feel able to participate and develop their skills and talents to their full potential based on aptitude and ability, while being in a safe, respectful and supportive environment.

MS-UK will operate in accordance with statutory requirements and not discriminate in our recruitment, retention, training and development of all staff and volunteers.

As an equal opportunities' employer, we welcome applications from all sections of the community in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023. We guarantee to remove personal information from applications before they are assessed, and our scoring process will be based purely on the criteria needed for the role applied for. We will make any necessary adjustments needed to interview those with a disability.

For clients, we aim to provide our services on a fair and equal basis, considering the needs of those using them. We take great care to treat every individual as a person in their own right, with the same equal rights and responsibilities as anyone else and will challenge discrimination. Our employees and volunteers will promote positive attitudes to benefit everyone who uses our services.

Any employee or volunteer that feels they are subject to discrimination has the right, under this policy, to seek redress through appropriate policies whether that be a formal complaint or a grievance.

Any client who feels they are subject to discrimination must be advised to use our Complaints procedure, where it will be investigated in accordance with MS-UK's Complaints policy. The management reserves the right to initiate disciplinary action against any employee or volunteer in this respect.

It is against the law to discriminate against anyone with protected characteristics, either directly or indirectly. The following are the legal protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity

- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Definitions

Equality, at its core, means fairness, where individuals or groups of individuals are not treated less favourably because of their protected characteristics. Equality of opportunity means that those who may be disadvantaged are able to get the tools they need to access the same, fair opportunities as their peers.

Diversity is recognising, respecting and valuing each other's differences. A diverse environment includes a wide range of backgrounds and mindsets, which allow for a culture of creativity.

Inclusion is creating an environment where differences are valued and used to enable everyone to thrive. An inclusive environment is one in which everyone feels that they belong without having to conform, that their contribution matters and they are able to perform to their full potential.

Detailed definitions of each protected characteristic can be found in MS-UK's Protected characteristics definitions.

Types of discrimination

Direct discrimination is when an individual, or group of individuals with a protected characteristic is treated less favourably than others. An example is an employer choosing not to employ a person who meets the requirements of the job because they are thought to have a protected characteristic.

Indirect discrimination is when rules or arrangements are made that apply to everyone, but that put someone with a protected characteristic at an unfair disadvantage. This can be unintentional so particular attention must be taken to avoid this form of discrimination. An example is when standard entry qualifications are applied automatically across a wide range of jobs that may lead to applicants being asked to meet requirements not relevant to the needs of a specific role.

Discrimination by association is when someone is discriminated against because of their association with someone who has a protected characteristic. An example is where an employee may be overlooked for promotion because they care for an elderly relative.

Discrimination by perception is when an individual is perceived to have a protected characteristic, when in fact they do not. An example is an employer not promoting an employee because they think they may have a disability.

Institutional discrimination is the collective failure of an organisation to provide appropriate policies, procedures and a professional service to people because of their protected characteristic. It can be found in processes, attitudes and behaviours that promote discrimination through prejudice, ignorance and stereotyping.

Harassment is unwanted behaviour linked to a protected characteristic that violates a person's dignity, or that creates an offensive environment for them. Harassment cannot be justified on the grounds that it was carried out in jest.

Third party harassment is the same as described above, where employees or volunteers either harass, or are harassed by individuals connected to MS-UK although not employed, such as clients, suppliers or visitors. Where these incidents or allegations are brought to the attention of MS-UK, an investigation will take place.

Victimisation is treating someone unfairly because they have complained about discrimination or harassment. An example is an employee or volunteer being treated less favourably because they have taken legal action against an employer or given evidence or information relating to such action.

Please refer to MS-UK's Bullying, inappropriate behaviour and harassment policy for further information.

Responsibilities

MS-UK has a responsibility, as an employer and service provider to embed equality, diversity and inclusion within the culture of the organisation. To do this we will ensure that

- staff, volunteers and clients are made aware of this policy so they can identify the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion
- training, development and information is provided to enable employees and volunteers to understand, and take ownership for their accountabilities
- a culture is maintained, that is supportive and inclusive and where individual differences and contributions are recognised and valued
- the language used in our policies and procedures are free from bias
- the widest possible diversity and demographic can access our services
- we promptly investigate any formal, or informal complaint or grievance made under this policy
- we review this policy and practices annually to ensure it remains effective, and implementing changes as appropriate

Employees and volunteers have a responsibility to

- treat colleagues, managers and clients with respect

- cooperate with initiatives, training opportunities and resources introduced by MS-UK that support and enable understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion
- be positive role models for our clients, by being friendly, polite and supportive
- avoid discrimination in the way our services are provided and promoted
- take account of the differences and needs of individuals, or groups with protected characteristics

Equality diversity and inclusion reviewed January 2024