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Equal Opportunities and Diversity Policy

Policy statement

Aquam is committed to being an equal opportunities organisation and embraces diversity in its true sense in relation to all groups and individuals that it deals with examples below:

1. **Employees, directors, subcontractors, and job applicants**
2. **Customers representatives**
3. **Employees from Suppliers & professional bodies with whom we work**
4. **And other people with whom we encounter within the work place**

This policy is not contractual but aims to set out the way in which Aquam aims to manage equality and diversity and to ensure that the people that it deals with are treated fairly, equitably, with respect and dignity.

Our policy also is designed to ensure that those listed above are offered the same opportunities regardless of their **race, religion or belief, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender re-assignment stages, marital status, disability, pregnancy, or maternity** which are laid out in the law as protected characteristics. Aquam also believe that true equality and diversity runs much deeper than this and would also aim to ensure that opportunities are offered regardless of any other characteristic unrelated to the performance of the job/task required. We seek to ensure that no one suffers as a result of discrimination.

We recognise that an effective policy will help all those listed above to develop to their full potential, which is clearly in the best interests of those involved with Aquam as a business. We aim to ensure that we not only observe the relevant legislation, but also do whatever is necessary to provide genuine equality, diversity and opportunity.

We expect all those listed above to be treated and to treat others with respect. Our aim is to provide a working environment free from harassment, intimidation, or discrimination in any form, which may affect the dignity of the individual.

We further recognise the benefits of employing and engaging with individuals from a range of backgrounds as this creates a workforce where creativity and valuing difference in others thrives. We value the wealth of experience within the community in which we operate and aspire to have a workforce that reflects this.

We expect all employees to support and uphold this policy through their words and actions and this is confirmed in one of the Professional Standards that we follow: Promoting and embedding British Values, equality and diversity. Furthermore, application of this standard is measured as part of our annual appraisal process.

We actively promote British Values within Aquam.

Democracy

- Your opinion counts

The rule of law

- No one is above the law
- Laws protect everyone
- Innocent until proved guilty

Individual liberty

- Freedom of speech

Respect and tolerance

- All backgrounds and cultures
- All ages
- All genders and sexualities
- All religions and beliefs

The legal framework

All employees and those that we deal with as listed above are expected to abide by the requirements of:

- The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 and the Equality Act 2010 (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which became law from the 26th October 2024. This Act and Regulation respectively:
 - Introduce a new legal duty on employers to take reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment of their workers (the 'preventative duty').
 - Continue to offer the same protection after the end of 2023 in relation to pregnancy, maternity and breastfeeding, indirect discrimination, access to employment and occupation, equal pay and the definition of disability.
- Any Codes of Practice issued by the Commission for Racial Equality, the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Disability Rights Commission.

Definition of discrimination is : **treating a person or particular group of people differently, especially in a worse way from the way in which you treat other people, because of their skin colour, sex, sexuality, etc.**

Discrimination may be direct, indirect, associative or perceptive and can take different forms, for example:

- **Direct discrimination** - treating any individual less favourably than others on grounds of his/her age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation (protected characteristics). Expecting a person, solely on the grounds stated above, to comply with requirements that are different to the requirements for others, for any reason whatsoever.
- **Indirect discrimination** - imposing requirements that are in effect more onerous than they are on others. For example this would include applying a condition (which is not warranted by the requirements of the position), which, makes it more difficult for members of a particular group to comply than others not of that group.
- **Associative Discrimination** - treating someone less favourably due to their association with an individual who has a protected characteristic.
- **Perceptive discrimination** - discriminating against someone on the assumption that they have a protected characteristic.
- **Victimisation** – subjecting an individual to a detriment because they have done or believed to have done a protected act.
- **Harassment** – subjecting an individual to unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic or not.
- Any other act or omission of an act, which has the effect of disadvantaging one person against another, purely on the above grounds.

On all occasions, where those in control of employees, are required to make judgments between them, for example disciplinary matters, selection for training, promotion, pay increases, awards, assignment outcomes etc. it is essential that the outcomes are judged solely on the merit, experience, skills and temperament and are made objectively and that the protected characteristics which are detailed above are not taken into consideration.

Responsibility for this policy

The overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of this policy rests with the Managing Director, however Directors and Line Managers have a crucial role to play in promoting and monitoring equality of opportunity and diversity in their own areas of responsibility and ensuring that their staff are promoting equality, diversity and British Values within the realms of their role.

All staff, irrespective of their job or seniority, will be given guidance and instruction, through our induction and other training, as to their responsibility and role in promoting equality and diversity. It is important that all staff do not tolerate discriminatory behaviour in all aspects of their role. Disciplinary action, including dismissal, may be taken against any employee found guilty of unfair discrimination or harassment.

Recruitment and selection of Aquam Staff

We aim to ensure that all staff that are responsible for recruitment and selection are familiar with this policy.

Selection will be conducted on an objective basis and will focus only on the applicants' suitability for the job and their ability to fulfil the job requirements. Our interest is in the skills, abilities, qualifications, aptitude, and the potential of individuals to do their jobs. Questions asked of candidates will relate to information that will help assess their ability to do the job. Job Descriptions and person specifications will be reviewed to ensure that criteria are not applied which are discriminatory, either directly or indirectly, and that they do not impose any condition or requirement, which cannot be justified by the demands of the post.

Training and development

Aquam recognises that equal opportunity responsibilities do not end at selection, and is committed to ensure that, wherever possible, all staff receives the widest possible range of development opportunities for advancement.

All employees will be encouraged to discuss their career prospects and training needs with their Line Manager. The provision of training will be reviewed to ensure that provisions are made where necessary to enable part-time workers, or those returning to work following a break to benefit from training. No age limits apply for entry to training or development schemes, which are open to all employees.

Terms and conditions of employment

We will ensure that all of our policies including compensation, benefits and any other relevant issues associated with Terms and Conditions of Employment, are formulated and applied without regard to **race, religion or belief, age, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, pregnancy or maternity, disability or Gender reassignment or any other characteristic** unrelated to the performance of the job. These will be reviewed regularly to ensure there is no discrimination.

Grievances, disputes, and disciplinary procedure

Staff who believe they have been discriminated against and have not been able to resolve this informally with the individual or their Line Manager are advised to use our internal Grievance Procedure. An employee who brings a complaint of discrimination must not be less favourably treated. Harassment or bullying will not be tolerated, and any individual employee who feels that he/she has been subjected to harassment or bullying should use our Bullying and Harassment Procedure.

Positive action

We also recognise that passive policies will not reverse the discrimination experienced by many groups of people. To this end, if certain groups are under-represented within our business, we will actively seek to encourage applications from those groups. Any measures taken to encourage applications should not in any way be construed as positive discrimination.

Communication of this policy

Employees will be made aware of this policy through our website. In addition, staff will be reminded of the policy through such means as advertisements, job descriptions, Online Training course handbooks.

Monitoring and review

The effectiveness of this policy will be reviewed annually through quality management review processes.

Policies and procedures

Our policies and procedures are reviewed annually to improve, amend, or adapt current practices to promote equality of opportunity within our business.

Queries or concerns

Any queries regarding the application of this policy should be raised initially with the Managing Director.

Other related Policies:

- Bullying & Harassment Policy MA 222

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Walker'.

Phil Walker MD
17th January 2025