



Equality and Diversity Strategy and Policy

Updated March 2017

Somerset Skills and Learning

Equality and Diversity Strategy

Somerset Skills & Learning places equality and diversity issues at the centre of every aspect of provision. Equality and diversity is embedded in the delivery of all teaching and learning activities and related services.

Although the terms equality and diversity are linked, they have a different emphasis.

Equality is about creating a fairer society where everyone can participate and have the opportunity to fulfil their potential – to live as equal citizens in society free from discrimination and harassment.

Diversity is about respecting, valuing and celebrating aspects that make us unique as individuals – recognising that we contribute to society because of these aspects, not in spite of them.

Somerset Skills & Learning (SS&L) is committed to advancing equality of opportunity to everyone, regardless of:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion & Belief
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Marriage and civil partnerships

This strategy reviews and considers how Somerset Skills & Learning:

- Eliminates discrimination, harassment and victimization
- Advances equality of opportunity
- Fosters good relationships

SS&L aims to support all learners to achieve their potential by removing barriers that prevent fair access to learning activities and training. We aim to ensure that learners with the potential to benefit from education have the opportunity to do so, whatever their needs, background, ability and culture.

Roles and Responsibilities

The **Strategic Manager** has overall responsibility for Equality and Diversity and is responsible for ensuring that the service complies with its obligations under the relevant legislation.

The **Senior Management Team** is responsible for the effective implementation and monitoring of this policy. SMT is specifically responsible for advising on Equality and Diversity in recruitment and employment of staff.

Each member of staff is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of this policy and its delivery within their own area of responsibility and for upholding good practice as outlined in related policies and statements.

The following outlines a range of strategies and practical activity which reflect the high level of commitment to promoting and advancing equality and diversity across the service. Please refer to the SAR (Self Assessment Review) for further information regarding current Equality & Diversity targets.

Marketing, staff recruitment and learner enrolment:

- Use of a range of promotional methods e.g. brochure, Somerset Skills & Learning website, presentations, informal visits to community groups, use of local websites, local press, 'good news' case studies, email promotions, flyers, displays, local community radio, community events, tasters, recruitment events / information events etc that are intended to reach a diverse audience.
- Use a format for published materials that is accessible, easy to understand, positive and inclusive. E.g. Published materials are made available in alternative formats such as large print, audio format, Somerset Total Communication and other languages to ensure we reach learners who may have a disability, or who may have limited or no English language skills.
- Use positive images in our publicity that reflects equality and diversity of opportunity. SS&L aims to make all publicity as accessible as possible and available in public places throughout the community.
- Engage in outreach activity and community development to widen participation in learning, and to stimulate interest and generate local involvement for people not currently engaged in adult education.
- Increase participation in courses by learners affected by educational, economic and social disadvantage. SS&L promotes equality of opportunity by reaching out to groups of people who may be disadvantaged in some way and who are not currently involved in learning (e.g. low skilled learners, learners with low level qualifications, members of a Black Minority Ethnic group, people with a disability, people with experience of mental ill health, members of a minority group such as travellers or homeless people).
- Create an inclusive, positive and secure environment where staff and learners feel confident and safe enough to disclose.
- Alert staff and learners to the dangers of radicalisation and to contact a Safeguarding Designated Person if they have any concerns.
- Have a team of Learning Support Coordinators that can advise and support learners to ensure they are on the right course, and to provide support to enable them to participate fully in their chosen area of learning.

Self-assessment and other quality improvement activities:

- Ensure that the Learner Involvement Policy and Complaints procedures are followed correctly. The SS&L Complaints Procedure is in place to ensure a fair, proper and constructive response to complaints.
- Involve all staff in contributing to self-assessment annually.
- Ensure that all observers of teaching and learning are trained in recognising and sharing good practice with regards to the embedding of equality and diversity within learning activities. Ensure, where appropriate, that observers and tutors work together to set SMART targets for the further promotion of equality and diversity within sessions.
- Analyse a range of equality and diversity performance data to help set challenging equality targets with regards to the recruitment and engagement of learners from diverse backgrounds (within specific curriculum areas).
- Ensure that learners included in 'Listening to Learners' and within the quality improvement cycle process cover a range of individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and minority groups (including learners from the protected characteristics groups).

Budget decisions and the allocation of resources:

- Consider the needs of those on low incomes when setting fees and charges.
- Ensure learners from disadvantaged groups or learners from deprived wards have access to free or low cost community based first step learning and community based projects funded via the Somerset Community Learning Partnership.
- Ensure that funding is allocated to a Learner Support Fund specifically designed to provide discretionary financial support to learners on low incomes. This includes those who may need additional financial support for transport or childcare costs.
- Carry out an annual analysis of the impact of expenditure on learner support services.
- Carry out Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) in respect of changes in policy and management decisions. SS&L use EIAs to ensure that when developing new policies and functions they are free from discrimination and where possible will ensure equality is actively advanced.

Employment practice:

- Meet and exceed all equality legislation and ensure good practice as an employer.
- Ensure recruitment and promotion for all positions within SS&L are carried out in a manner which reflects equal opportunities practice.
- Ensure all interview panels have undertaken training in recruitment and selection practices and procedures.
- Monitor the overall SS&L staff profile to ensure, where possible, it is diverse and reflective of the Somerset population.

- Ensure reasonable adjustments for staff with disabilities are identified and catered for at every stage of employment from recruitment onwards.
- Ensure relevant support and training is available for all staff to support the organisations equality and diversity policy. SS&L provide development and training to ensure staff are committed to removing possible barriers and supporting all learners to achieve their full potential.
- Line managers ensure that all staff are aware that Equality & Diversity is not a specialist function, but the responsibility of all. Contribution to equality and diversity is embedded within the annual staff review process.
- Through the SS&L 'Equality and Diversity Group' send a clear message that SS&L values equality and diversity matters and sees these as of the utmost importance. Through this group promote 'Champions' of Equality and Diversity that can advise and support other members of staff in such matters.
- Ensure appropriate support is available for employees who are carers. This can be through a range of solutions such as flexible working, temporarily or permanently reduced hours, home working (if viable), compassionate leave etc.
- Provide regular and supportive line management where employees can discuss any additional needs or support that may be required due to a disability.
- Provide an informal staff forum and support network for staff with a disability to ensure that the voices of staff with disabilities are heard. Ensure all staff feel supported and safe in their working environment.

Enrichment trips and visits:

- Provide opportunities for additional/extended learning activity where appropriate.
- Create visible signs that equality and diversity is valued by SS&L to help raise awareness, foster an inclusive organisational ethos and create a culture of confidence and respect. For example, celebrate diversity through regular food, dance, art and drama activities and events, trips and visits.
- Provide opportunities for learners to undertake non-traditional ways of learning such as eLearning, blended learning and video conferencing. This may enable learners to overcome barriers to learning and helps them to access courses that might normally be inaccessible to them due to transport, mobility or childcare issues.
- Organise meetings, social or community events that bring people from different communities and backgrounds together to promote social inclusion.
- Investigate all outside speakers or visitors and accompany within our centres.

Information, Advice and Guidance:

- Provide both informal and formal impartial information advice and guidance (IAG) which supports learners from a range of backgrounds and experiences to progress onto further learning, volunteering opportunities or employment.

- Provide clear progression routes into employment, training, adult or further education; enabling learners to build on what they have achieved and to realise their career or life aspirations.
- Ensure good learner progression through the provision of high quality information, advice and guidance and strategic curriculum planning, which meets the needs of learners and local communities.

Additional Learning Support:

- Provide specialist Learning Support Coordinators who are fully trained and can assess and address specific learner needs. SS&L ensure that all learners succeed and can progress in ways that match their abilities and aspirations.
- Identify and where possible remove potential barriers to learning to enable access to appropriate courses e.g. support with childcare, financial support and provision of specialist equipment to aid learning (for people with disabilities), provision of learning support for people with learning needs e.g. dyslexia.

Procurement and Contracted Out Services:

- Comply with SS&L procurement procedures to ensure fair and equal opportunities and to ensure that business decisions are taken without prejudice or discrimination.
- Use the procurement process to ensure best value for money for goods and services obtained.
- Provide potential sub-contractors with an open and transparent process when bidding for specific contract delivery e.g. Adult Safeguarded Learning pre-contract application process, Community Learning Fund application process

Teaching and Learning:

- Create an inclusive and diverse curriculum. SS&L aims to plan and deliver a flexible and responsive curriculum that provides a full range of learning opportunities, to engage learners from a range of different backgrounds and experiences. This includes offering daytime, evening and weekend courses at Somerset Skills & Learning Centres, outreach and community venues. Our programme includes a diverse offering from short courses, personal and development courses, functional skills (English and Maths), Community Learning Partnership (CLP), family learning, apprenticeships and a substantial and higher-level skills provision including Access to Higher Education. Also included within our mainstream curriculum we aim to offer new and innovative ways of learning e.g. blended learning and e learning.
- Provide learning programmes that are flexible and which include 'bite-sized' provision, designed to accommodate, motivate and retain adults with work, caring, family or other competing priorities.
- Provide targeted and bespoke courses that meet the needs of individuals and various groups within local communities e.g. Community English courses, specialist courses for women with experiences of domestic abuse, courses specifically designed for carers etc

- Provide mainstream courses that integrate people with learning difficulties or disabilities and encourage positive interaction between different groups of learners, regardless of their age, ethnic origin, gender, social status, religion or educational background.
- Ensure pre-course assessment is fair and impartial methods of assessment establish individuals' prior learning, skills and achievements, identify their strengths and weaknesses and clarify any learning support.
- Ensure delivery is 'learner' focused and caters for, and supports all learners to achieve e.g. differentiated learning, accessible high quality resources, appropriate assessment methods etc
- Encourage tutors to plan for different learning styles, and educational resources which enhance equality of learning opportunity.
- Ensure resource materials are free from racist, sexist, ageist, disabling and other discriminatory assumptions, images and language.
- Ensure all learners are alerted to e-safety and the dangers of radicalisation.
- Encourage tutors to positively promote equality and diversity within teaching and learning.
- Provide a clear Safeguarding Policy to ensure any issues are effectively addressed. Staff will actively challenge discriminatory or bullying behaviour in all aspects of SS&L activity and delivery.
- Provide an ongoing CPD programme to ensure staff place equality & diversity at the centre of their work.

Premises:

- Provide buildings and learning environments that are fully accessible and do not present obstacles to people with sight, hearing or other physical/sensory impairments.
- Provide specialist equipment within training rooms and classrooms that supports learners with specific needs to access the curriculum and learning activities e.g. hearing loops.
- Use outreach facilities and community venues that provide local learning opportunities, especially within communities that may be disadvantaged or rurally isolated.

Partnerships:

- Work in partnership with appropriate agencies to engage with disadvantaged or minority groups and/or people from deprived wards, and develop appropriate and relevant learning opportunities. E.g. the development of Somerset Community Learning (CLP) bids targeted at disadvantaged groups or residents of deprived wards.
- Carefully vet all partnerships to ensure SS&L do not inadvertently fund extremist organisations.
- Work with a range of partner employers and sub-contractors to offer learners from disadvantaged groups apprenticeship opportunities and inclusive programmes of learning, which support the learner interests and individual needs.

- Engage with, listen to, and respond to the views of our local communities, current learners and potential learners e.g. completion and progression survey, annual survey, 'listening to learner' meetings, focus groups.
- Ensure that the views of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and other marginalised groups are both sought and heard to enable individual needs to be met. Hold discussions and community forums with interest groups, specialist agencies and individuals who can help identify unmet needs.
- Membership of local networks, voluntary sector groups and local strategic partnerships that are representative of local communities.
- Take positive ongoing action, to develop a range of partnerships in order to engage with learners in specific geographical areas, deprived wards or with learners who are from disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups.

Learner Services:

- Meet and exceed all equality legislation. SS&L treats learners, including potential learners, with respect and dignity, providing support and recognition, and promoting access and fair treatment.
- Provide a safe, accessible and inclusive environment for all learners.
- Ensure all learners
- Provide signposting to other specialist agencies to support learners, particularly those from protected characteristics, such as Citizens Advice Bureau, specialist employment agencies, local colleges.

Human Resources (HR):

Principles:

Somerset Skills & Learning CIC is committed to being a workplace where all job applicants and all employees are treated as individuals with dignity and respect and where positive challenge to violation of human rights, harassment, victimisation and discriminatory behaviour is part of daily working practice. SS&L CIC encourages good communication between all employees in order to understand the underlying reasons for, and thereby avoid, potential conflicts.

Policies:

SS&L CIC policies and procedures provide all job applicants and all employees with equal opportunity without harassment, victimisation and direct or indirect discrimination, because of legally protected characteristics (either by association or perception).

SS&L CIC will prevent detriment arising from disability and comply with its duty to make reasonable adjustments for the benefit of applicants and employees who have declared a disability.

Workplace Practice:

SS&L CIC will not condone behaviour at work, near the workplace and at work-related social functions, which discriminates, harasses or victimises job applicants or individual employees because of legally protected characteristics. The legally protected characteristics are: age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

This also applies where:

an employee is treated less favourably because they are perceived to have a protected characteristic even if they do not have that protected characteristic or an employee is treated less favourably because they are associated with someone who has a protected characteristic even if they themselves do not have that protected characteristic.

Duties and Responsibilities:

All employees have a role to play in treating each other as individuals with respect and dignity at all times, taking responsibility for ensuring their own behaviour and actions comply with and support the Policy.

All employees and managers must aim to avoid potential conflict by identifying problems at an early stage and attempting to deal with them by, for example, talking to the people involved in a non-confrontational way.

Equalities Learning:

All managers have responsibility for ensuring that their employees understand this policy through induction, probation and further learning and are helped to put that learning into practice.

All managers will receive opportunities to learn about their duties and responsibilities through management induction, probation and further learning.

Unwanted Conduct:

Unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual constitutes harassment. Any employee who is found to have committed an act of harassment, victimisation or discrimination to the detriment of job applicants, other employees, volunteers, staff of suppliers, service users, or members of the public because of protected characteristics, will be subject to disciplinary action.

An employee who feels they have suffered a detriment as a result of harassment, victimisation or discrimination directed at them because of a protected characteristic, or who has witnessed behaviour directed at others that has led to such a detriment, will be supported in seeking a resolution.

Managers need to seek a resolution promptly and appropriately where they are made aware of behaviour or actions, which SS&L CIC has designated as unacceptable; and ensure support is provided for all those involved.

SS&L CIC has a Dignity at Work Code of Practice. The Grievance Procedure provides a framework for dealing with complaints about bullying and harassment.

Third Parties:

SS&L CIC will take such steps as reasonably practicable to prevent harassment by a third party related to a protected characteristic, where SS&L CIC knows, or ought reasonably to know, that an employee is at real risk of being harassed by a third party. SS&L CIC will take seriously allegations

from staff of deliberate discrimination by volunteers or staff employed by suppliers and will do all within its powers to ensure the allegations are investigated and appropriate action is taken.

Terms and Conditions of Employment:

SS&L CIC will comply with its legal duty to provide equal pay for work of equal value and provide benefits and facilities equally and proportionately to all employees.

SS&L CIC will follow flexible employment policies, which recognise the skills and expertise of employees and the need to retain them.

The impact of employment policies and practices will be assessed to identify potential detriment to those with protected characteristics based on perceptions which are irrelevant, or on assumptions unjustifiable in terms of an individual's ability to do a job.

Managers will aim to ensure informal working practices do not directly or indirectly disadvantage any employee from accessing career opportunities.

Recruitment, Selection and Promotion:

SS&L CIC aims to eliminate bias and discrimination in recruitment, selection and promotion practice.

When vacancies occur, managers are expected to consider the possibilities of job sharing, part-time working or other flexible working arrangements.

Employees who are selecting candidates must comply with the Recruitment and Selection policy and must have undertaken recruitment and selection training.

SS&L CIC will not ask job candidates about their health at an early stage in the recruitment process, unless such questions are necessary for:

- Establishing whether a candidate is able to comply with a requirement to undergo an assessment for the job and whether reasonable adjustments are needed in respect of this assessment
- Establishing whether a candidate is able to carry out a function that is intrinsic to the work concerned
- Monitoring diversity
- Establishing any gaps in employment (Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults)
- Taking Positive Action
- Establishing whether a candidate has a particular disability which is an occupational requirement

Employee Development:

Managers are expected to take account of equality policy and practice when appraising employees and offering development opportunities in the workplace.

Managers are expected to ensure opportunities for formal and informal professional development, in-service training and qualifications are open to all and selection is based on open and objective criteria.

Positive Action:

Positive Action may include proactive advertising, job design, support networks, help-lines, mentoring, coaching or training. SS&L CIC will adopt Positive Action to encourage recruitment and improve access amongst those under-represented at all levels in its workforce if it reasonably thinks that:

- people who share a protected characteristic suffer a disadvantage connected to the characteristic, or have needs that are different from the needs of those who do not share that characteristic; or participation in an activity by persons who share a protected characteristic is disproportionately low.

- proportionate steps may be taken to meet their needs or enable or encourage them to overcome or minimise the disadvantage or participate in the relevant activity.

Breaches of Policy:

Any employee found to have breached policy will be subject to disciplinary action.

Workforce Monitoring:

The Chief Executive Officer is responsible for the operation and monitoring of the policy.