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| **Name of Policy / Strategy:** | Equality, Diversity Inclusion Policy | | |
| **Written by:** | Justin Speirs | | |
| **Approved by:** | Management Team | **Date:** | March 2025 |
| **Implementation Date:** | March 2025 | | |
| **Review date\*:** | March 2028 | | |
| \*This document will be reviewed every 3 years or when there are operational or legislative changes that require a review. | | | |
| **Associated policies, procedures & Strategies:** | Safeguarding Policy  Admissions Policy  Learner Behaviour Policy  Complaints Policy  Learner Voice Strategy  CEIAG Strategy | | |
| **Amendments (include date)** | September 2024   * Added “inclusion” to policy title and content * re-write policy statement, which now includes reference to inclusion and not just E&D and includes overview of how this will be achieved through eliminate, advance and foster descriptors * Update roles and responsibilities * Inclusion of reference to ‘hate speech’ in Safeguarding section * Remove reference to E&D group * Added reference to Matrix in IAG section and embedding IAG quality assurance in quality cycle * Combined Learning Support and Learner Services sections together * Addition of ‘sexual harassment when referring to harassment | | |

**Equality & Diversity Policy Statement**

At Somerset Skills & Learning (SS&L), we are committed to placing equality, diversity, and inclusion at the heart of everything we do. These principles are embedded in the delivery of all teaching, learning activities, and related services, ensuring that all individuals are valued and supported.

While equality, diversity, and inclusion are interconnected, each term has a distinct meaning:

* **Equality** focuses on creating a fairer society where everyone can participate fully, with equal opportunities to fulfil their potential, and live as equal citizens, free from discrimination, harassment, and prejudice.
* **Diversity** celebrates the unique characteristics that make each of us different, recognising that these differences contribute positively to our learning community. We believe that diversity is a strength to be respected, valued, and embraced.
* **Inclusion** ensures that all individuals feel welcomed, supported, and able to thrive. We are committed to fostering an environment where everyone can fully engage in education and training, regardless of their background or personal circumstances.

In accordance with the **Equality Act 2010**, Somerset Skills & Learning is dedicated to advancing equality of opportunity for all, regardless of:

* Age
* Disability
* Gender reassignment
* Marriage and civil partnership
* Pregnancy and maternity
* Race
* Religion or belief
* Sex
* Sexual orientation

SS&L strives to eliminate all forms of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation by promoting fairness and equality in every aspect of our work. To achieve this, we will:

* **Eliminate** unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
* **Advance** equality of opportunity by recognising and addressing barriers to access.
* **Foster** good relations by promoting mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration among our diverse community.

We are committed to supporting all learners and staff to achieve their full potential. This includes identifying and removing barriers to participation in education and training, ensuring that everyone has fair access, regardless of their needs, background, ability or culture.

To fulfil this commitment, we continually review and improve our policies, practices and services to ensure they remain inclusive and responsive to the diverse needs of our learners, staff, and the wider community.

**Roles and Responsibilities**

The **Executive Directors (ED)** have overall responsibility for Equality and Diversity and is responsible for ensuring that the company complies with its obligations under the relevant legislation.

The **Management Team** is responsible for the effective implementation and monitoring of this policy. 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.

**Policy Implementation**

SS&L aims to implement its Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy through the following strategies:

* Promoting Our curriculum to a Diverse Audience:

SS&L uses a variety of promotional methods to ensure we reach a wide and diverse audience, including brochures, our website, social media, presentations, informal visits to community groups, local websites, press, ‘good news’ case studies, email campaigns, flyers, displays, local community radio, and community events. We also participate in taster sessions, recruitment events, and information days to engage people from diverse backgrounds.

* Accessible and Inclusive Communication:

All published materials will be in formats that are easy to understand and accessible. We will explore alternative formats, such as large print, audio versions and translations wherever reasonably practical. These adaptations aim to meet the needs of learners with disabilities, sensory impairments, and those with limited or no English language skills.

* Using Positive and Inclusive Imagery:

Our publicity materials will feature images that reflect the diversity of our community and opportunities for all. We aim to make these materials accessible and available in public spaces throughout the community to reach the widest audience.

* Outreach and Community Engagement:

SS&L will engage in outreach and community development activities to increase participation in learning, particularly among those who are not currently involved in adult education. We work to stimulate interest and foster involvement across all sectors of the community.

* Widening Participation for Underrepresented Groups:

We will actively promote and increase participation in courses among learners who may face educational, economic or social disadvantage. This includes people with low skills or qualifications, people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, those with disabilities, those experiencing mental health challenges, travellers, homeless individuals, and others who may not have traditionally been involved in learning.

* Creating a Safe and Inclusive Environment:

SS&L is committed to creating an inclusive, positive, and secure environment where both staff and learners feel confident and safe enough to disclose any concerns or personal needs. We will ensure that there are a variety of mechanisms for both staff and learners to feedback and/or report any concerns they may have. Our aim is to ensure everyone feels respected, supported, listened to and valued while at SS&L

* Safeguarding and Preventing Radicalisation:

We will continue to raise awareness among staff and learners about safeguarding issues, including the risks of radicalisation. We encourage everyone to report concerns to our Safeguarding team. We are also committed to addressing other safeguarding concerns such as online safety, bullying, hate speech and any forms of exploitation.

* Providing Learner Support:

Our Customer Enquiries Team and Recruitment Coordinators will provide guidance and support to ensure learners are enrolled on the right courses and have access to any reasonable additional support they may need to fully participate in their chosen area of learning.

**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, diversity and inclusion within learning activities. Ensure, where appropriate, that observers and tutors work together to set SMART targets for the further promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion 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.
* 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.

**Employment practice:**

* Meet 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 organisation’s Equality, Diversity & Inclusion 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 and inclusion are not a specialist function, but the responsibility of all.
* 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), unpaid leave, 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.

**Enrichment trips and visits:**

* Provide opportunities for additional/extended learning activity where appropriate.
* Provide opportunities for learners to undertake non-traditional ways of learning such as e-learning, 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 and 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:**

* Achieve and maintain the Matrix Standard to demonstrate the effectiveness of SS&L’s IAG offer.
* 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.
* Embed IAG quality assurance activity in the company’s quality cycle activity embedded in the Quality Strategy

**Learning Support:**

* Provide specialist Learning Support Coordinator who is 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.
* Meet 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.
* Provide signposting to other specialist agencies to support learners, particularly those from protected characteristics, such as Citizens Advice Bureau, specialist employment agencies, local colleges.

**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

**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 SS&L centres and community venues. Our programme includes a diverse offering of short courses and workshops, personal and development courses, qualifications and apprenticeships. 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 all learners to achieve e.g. differentiated learning, accessible high-quality resources, appropriate assessment methods etc.
* Encourage and support tutors to plan for different learning styles and utilise educational resources which enhance equality of learning opportunities.
* 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 and support tutors to positively promote equality and diversity within teaching and learning.
* Provide a clear Safeguarding & Prevent 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 and inclusion 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, where reasonably able to do so, in training rooms and classrooms that supports learners with specific needs to access the curriculum and learning activities.
* 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.
* 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.

**Human Resources (HR):**

***Principles:***

SS&L 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, sexual harassment, victimisation and discriminatory behaviour is part of daily working practice. SS&L encourages good communication between all employees in order to understand the underlying reasons for, and thereby avoid, potential conflicts.

***Policies:***

SS&L policies and procedures provide all job applicants and all employees with equal opportunity without harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation and direct or indirect discrimination, because of legally protected characteristics (either by association or perception). SS&L 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 will not condone behaviour at work, near the workplace and at work-related social functions, which discriminates, harasses, sexually 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, sexual 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, sexual 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 has designated as unacceptable, and ensure support is provided for all those involved. The [Grievance Procedure](http://enterprise.somerset.gov.uk/HR/policies/Grievance%20Procedure.asp) provides a framework for dealing with complaints about bullying and harassment.

***Third Parties:***

SS&L will take such steps as reasonably practicable to prevent harassment by a third party related to a protected characteristic, where SS&L 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 allegations seriously 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 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 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 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 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, diversity and inclusion 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 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 this policy will be subject to disciplinary action.

***Workforce Monitoring:***

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