

Equality and Diversity Policy

This is Oblong's Equality and Diversity Policy and it forms a major part of our ethos. All employees are bound by its contents:

1. Equality and diversity statement
2. Management issues and delivery mechanisms
3. Employee practices
4. Service delivery
5. Monitoring and evaluation
6. Review of this policy

Appendix

Harassment and dignity at work

1. Equality and diversity statement

Oblong aims to promote equality and diversity as an employer and seeks to ensure that principles of equality and of appreciation of diversity underpin all areas of the organisation's work and service provision.

Oblong recognises that many people and groups suffer discrimination and face serious barriers when trying to fulfil their true potential. It also recognises that not all forms of unreasonable and unfair discrimination are the subject of legislation. It is the aim of this organisation to take positive steps to redress discrimination, to improve equality of opportunity and to combat any unreasonable or unfair treatment which places people at a disadvantage for any reasons not

directly related to their ability to do a job for this organisation or to their eligibility to get involved at Oblong.

In most cases it is unlawful to discriminate against people because of their gender or gender assignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, colour, nationality, ethnic and national origin, sexuality/sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, or because they are disabled, married or in a civil partnership, a member of a trade union, or because they work part time or on a fixed-term contract. It is also unlawful to discriminate against people either because they are perceived to have a certain characteristic or because they associate with someone who has a certain characteristic.

However we recognise that people may experience discrimination for many additional social, educational and economic reasons such as their language, health, caring responsibilities, trade union activity, where they live, how they speak and whether they work flexibly. This policy will apply equally to all these circumstances.

Oblong will not tolerate discrimination, harassment, bullying, victimisation or abuse of people who are members of staff or of people connected with the Oblong's activities.

2. Management issues and delivery mechanisms

Oblong's board of trustees has ultimate responsibility for compliance with the legal elements of the equality and diversity policy. It is however the responsibility of the peer managers to implement, monitor and evaluate the equality and diversity policy in terms of employment practice, volunteer co-ordination, service delivery and changes to legislation. They are also under a duty to ensure that the board of trustees is regularly kept informed of the policy's implementation and the implications of the board of trustees' decisions and policies for equality and diversity issues. It is the responsibility of all staff to report any discrimination of which they become aware.

All employees and board of trustees members will be informed that an equality and diversity policy is in operation and that they are bound to comply with its requirements. The policy will also be drawn to the attention of Oblong's members, funding agencies, job applicants and volunteers at Oblong.

The 'Equality and Diversity Statement' above shall be easily available in our offices, accessible to staff and visitors. Staff and trustees are to be made aware of the whole policy upon appointment/election and whenever the policy is modified. They will be directed to view the electronic copy on a shared drive accessible to them.

Oblong's Grievance Policy and/or Disciplinary Policy will be used to deal with any complaints about discrimination, harassment or bullying involving staff. For any similar complaints involving volunteers, the Acceptable Behaviour Policy will be used.

Complaints from people using the organisation's services will be dealt with through Oblong's complaints procedure.

Oblong seeks a broad and representative board of trustees.

It is expected that when staff or trustees represent Oblong on the committees of other agencies they will endeavour to ensure that principles and practices to support equality and appreciation of diversity are adopted by those agencies.

3. Employment practices

Oblong aims to promote equality and diversity as an employer and to ensure that no job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment or is disadvantaged by conditions or requirements that cannot be shown to be justifiable within the context of the policy.

Oblong regards discrimination, harassment, abuse, victimisation or bullying of staff, volunteers, centre users or of others in the course of work as disciplinary offences that could be regarded as gross misconduct. Condoning such behaviour could also be treated as a disciplinary offence. As

well as disciplining the perpetrator(s), we will give appropriate support to people who complain of harassment of themselves or others.

Selection, recruitment, training, promotion and employment practices generally will be subject to regular review to ensure that they comply with the equality and diversity policy. In particular, selection and recruitment procedures should be reviewed every two years in order to try and constantly improve equality and diversity practices.

Oblong will attempt to accommodate staff requests to work flexibly, whether part-time or some other working arrangement, for whatever reason, so long as agreement is consistent with the needs of the organisation (see Flexible Working Policy).

We recognise that organisations are obliged under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate disabled people and to enable them to do their job without unnecessary difficulty. We will make adjustments which are reasonable, for both staff and volunteers.

We accept our obligation not to discriminate against applicants and employees on the basis of their religion or belief. We will try to accommodate employees' religious beliefs in any way which is compatible with the work of the organisation by, for example, allowing for prayers during the working day and at the workplace; considering employees' dietary requirements in providing facilities for staff to eat and store food; allowing staff to take their holidays for religious festivals; trying to arrange job interviews or other important work meetings at times when they do not clash with important religious festivals; and not imposing a dress code with which people of a particular religion cannot comply.

Oblong will not discriminate on grounds of age in recruitment, promotion, training, or in the availability of benefits such as pension contributions or health insurance.

Oblong will take whatever positive action is required where it can be shown that under-representation of any particular group has occurred in recruitment. Where appropriate and where legally permissible, employees from under-represented groups will be given training and encouragement in order to promote equality and diversity within Oblong.

4. Service delivery

Oblong will seek to ensure that its activities and services are accessible to all sections of the community served by Oblong. In particular Oblong will seek to remove barriers which may prevent those most at social, economic or educational disadvantage accessing our activities. We will also ensure that annual impact assessment in our local community drives our strategic priorities.

Oblong will make public its commitment to combating discriminatory attitudes where these are encountered.

Oblong will attempt to ensure that none of its policies discriminate directly or indirectly against any group or individual.

Oblong will operate a Complaints Procedure that will include its objectives with regard to equality and diversity in service delivery.

Oblong will attempt to find ways of making our activities and services accessible to everyone, including people for whom English is not a first language, people with visual or hearing impairments, and people who live in remote rural areas and/or who cannot easily travel. Oblong will take all reasonable steps to ensure that all its activities are carried out in premises which are accessible to people with mobility difficulties. In the event that the premises operated by Oblong are not accessible for particular individuals, Oblong will arrange alternative meeting places. This will include committee meetings.

Oblong will be sensitive to the particular needs of participants by trying wherever possible to provide, for example, translations, childcare facilities run by vetted carers and, when providing food, having regard to religious and other dietary requirements.

Oblong will operate a variety of means to allow people to contact staff.

5. Monitoring and evaluation

Oblong will regularly evaluate its services and the effectiveness of its equality and diversity policy by a variety of means.

Monitoring may be carried out by Oblong to provide the data for this regular evaluation. For instance, Oblong may ask clients using our services, job applicants, volunteers and trustees for information about their ethnic origin, disability, age or other personal information. We will only do this for a specific defined purpose such as collecting statistical data for funders, for research or for our own monitoring to evaluate this policy's impact.

Oblong will be sensitive to groups and individuals and will have due regard for the principles of data protection when seeking information. Where sensitive information is gathered, those responding will be explicitly informed of the purpose and that they are at liberty to withhold the information. All monitoring information will be securely stored, aggregated and anonymised.

6. Review of this policy

Oblong's commitment to equality and diversity is an active one. This document will be amended on a regular basis as part of this active commitment.

Oblong's equality and diversity policy will be reviewed as and when required and in line with changes in legislation.

Oblong will also seek to keep abreast of new developments in practice to support equality and diversity and actively seek information on these topics.

Date Agreed by [board of trustees]

Review date

Appendix

Harassment and dignity at work

Oblong's objectives will be best served if staff work in harmony with each other. Each member of staff should respect other members of staff and realise that behaviour that they may find acceptable may not be so regarded by others.

Peer managers shall act and react towards each other in a manner which respects their dignity. They shall work to ensure that volunteers they work with are guided to act in a similar way in their relationships with each other.

Harassment at work in any form is entirely unacceptable and each member of staff carries responsibility for their own behaviour under the policy.

Harassment

The Equality Act 2010 defines harassment as unwanted conduct which has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity, or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person.

Harassment because of sex, age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, maternity and pregnancy is prohibited by the Equality Act. Harassment at work in any form is entirely unacceptable to Oblong, whether or not it is because of a characteristic protected by law.

It is unlawful to harass someone or discriminate against them on the grounds of a characteristic they are perceived to have and it does not matter whether they actually possess that characteristic.

The law also protects someone who is associated with another person who has a protected characteristic, for instance because of their partner's race or because their parent is disabled.

Harassment may be persistent or an isolated incident. Actions or comments which are demeaning or unacceptable to the recipient can amount to harassment, regardless of the intention of the perpetrator. In extreme or repeated situations, harassment may amount to bullying or abuse.

Examples of unacceptable behaviour include:

- spreading malicious rumours, or insulting someone (particularly on grounds of any of the protected characteristics)
- copying memos that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know
- ridiculing or demeaning someone
- picking on someone or setting them up to fail
- exclusion or victimisation
- unfair treatment
- overbearing micromanagement outside of usual peer management processes
- misuse of power to undermine decisions or an individual's work agreed upon through the collective model
- unwelcome sexual advances – touching, standing too close, display of offensive materials
- making threats or comments about job security without foundation
- deliberately undermining a competent worker by overloading and/or constant criticism
- preventing individuals progressing by intentionally blocking their learning and development opportunities

Bullying and harassment are not necessarily face to face, they may be by written communications, visual images (for example pictures of a sexual nature or embarrassing photographs of colleagues), email, phone, and automatic supervision methods – such as computer recording of downtime from work, or recording of telephone conversations – if these are not universally applied to all workers.

The definitions of harassment and bullying are adapted from the ACAS guide *Bullying and Harassment at Work*, Oct 2010, see www.acas.org.uk

Oblong will provide support for employees who allege harassment and those against whom harassment has been alleged.

Oblong will take appropriate action to protect employees from harassment by third parties during the course of employment. This may include harassment by Oblong's clients, members of the public and employees of other organisations. It is important that such incidents are reported by employees to the staff team.

Fair procedures will be followed and instigated promptly to minimise potential stress both for the alleged harasser and the complainant. Where possible and appropriate, complaints should be resolved informally. (See applicable policies for details of these procedures - i.e. Disciplinary and Grievance Policies for staff and Acceptable Behaviour Policy for volunteers.)

Victimisation

Employees will not be victimised in any way for complaining about discrimination or racial, sexual or other forms of harassment or for giving evidence about such a complaint.

False allegation

Staff should not be subjected to unwarranted or vexatious complaints. Where it is found that an employee is using this procedure to make deliberately false allegations, or as a form of bullying against a colleague or manager, this may be treated as misconduct, and in serious cases may justify dismissal.

Date Agreed by [board of trustees]

Review date

Relevant Legislation

Employment Rights Act 1996

The Equality Act 2010