

Equality & Diversity



This briefing is one of a series to support youth information, advice, counselling and support services (YIACS) to develop policies in:

- Equality & Diversity
- Active Involvement and Participation
- Confidentiality

Youth Access will require YIACS to have these policies in place as part of new full membership criteria from April 2008. The policies are minimum criteria for service standards and underpin 'Youth Access Quality Standards for YIACS'.

The purpose of this briefing is to offer a guide to the context and content of an Equality and Diversity policy. It is not intended as a detailed analysis of the legal and other issues surrounding Equality & Diversity, but it will point you to other resources.

What is Equality & Diversity?

- Equality in its wider sense encompasses gender, race, disability, sexual orientation and discrimination on the grounds of age, language or social origin, or of other personal attributes, including beliefs or opinions, such as religious belief or political opinion. It is not about treating everyone the same, it is about recognising and respecting diversity and difference.
- There are six recognised diversity strands: gender, disability, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation and religion and/or belief. Diversity is about embracing and celebrating the richness of society and ensuring under-represented communities have a stake in it. It is about relationships and the creation of an environment in which everyone can thrive. It is also about valuing the unique skills, experiences and perspectives of every individual and finding ways to bring the best out of them.

The need for an Equality & Diversity Policy

- An Equality & Diversity Policy shows how your organisation actively opposes discrimination; demonstrating your commitment to making your organisation fully accessible and inclusive and welcoming and respectful of diversity.
- An inclusive Policy is one of the key factors in creating a sustainable organisation - reflecting the rich diversity of society and ensuring equality of opportunity for everyone involved. The policy should ensure opportunities are genuinely available and accessible to all potential participants and that initiatives do not have a negative impact on any disadvantaged groups.
- YIACS and other voluntary sector organisations are employers and service providers, and thus need to ensure best practice throughout these operations. The policy has implications for personal attitudes and professional conduct; for the organisation, i.e. its management, recruitment and selection policies and procedures; and for its service delivery.
- All organisations need to be aware of their obligations under current discrimination legislation. While legislation can support your agency to improve service access and its working practices, it also gives people rights to challenge you. If you infringe the legislation, you may face large penalties and adverse publicity.

What should be covered in our Equality and Diversity Policy?

The Policy should cover all aspects of your organisation and its work. It includes:

- The following groups: existing and potential service users, paid and volunteer staff and management committee/board members (if applicable). If staff employed by other agencies also deliver services on your premises, you should consider how you account for their equality and diversity practice in any protocols or management agreements.
- Discrimination on the grounds of: gender (explicitly including transgender and transsexual identity); race or ethnicity; sexual identity or orientation (lesbian, gay, bisexual and heterosexual); age; relationship or marital status; HIV status; background; faith or religious belief; physical appearance; political opinions; immigration status; long term illness; physical or mental ability.

How do we define the purpose and parameters of a policy?

You need to formulate a declaration setting out your agency's specific commitment to equality and diversity and your intention to challenge discrimination. It should include:

- An acknowledgement of the grounds on which people are discriminated (see previous section above for list of grounds).
- A commitment to delivering services that are accessible and to recognise and tackle the discrimination that people face. If your agency is set up to serve a specific group of young people, your statement should emphasise this.
- A statement outlining what people should do if they feel the organisation has not met its stated aims.

What are the main areas of activity YIACS should cover in their policies?

Staff employment (paid and volunteer)

You will need to identify the employment practices your agency will use to ensure the fair treatment of all staff. This needs to include:

- Recruitment and selection procedures: For example, the use of set criteria and questions to make the process as objective as possible; monitoring applicants who apply; positively encouraging applicants from underrepresented groups to apply.
- Conditions of service to reflect the needs of employees: For example, allowing leave for dependents, paternity, religious holidays etc. You may also include the implementation of the equality and diversity policy as a condition of employment.
- Policies on personal and career development for all staff, as well as specific training on equality and diversity awareness.
- Measures to prevent and tackle bullying, harassment and victimisation and how complaints are raised and dealt with.
- You may also need to make reference to other related policies affecting your employment practices such as Recruitment, Retention & Induction, Training & Development, and Grievance & Disciplinary procedures.

Management

Next, you will need to identify the management practices your agency will employ to ensure equality and diversity.

- If you are managed by a management committee or board, your constitution will dictate the eligibility criteria and the legal process for appointing members. However, within these constraints your Equality and Diversity policy should set out the steps the organisation will take to ensure its composition is as diverse and representative as possible.
- A good practice example is to look at the committee as a community management board, where you seek to ensure a diversity of experience, background, identity and opinion. Thus, your policy needs to address the way you appoint new committee members, including how you advertise vacancies (adverts should include details of your commitment to equality and diversity) and the balance between elected and co-opted members.
- Equality and diversity awareness should also feature in the induction and training of committee members.
- Your policy should also make it clear that decision making always takes place in all formal meetings, not as a result of informal discussions elsewhere which exclude fellow committee members. The location and timings of meetings also need to be considered within your policy.

Service delivery

Finally, you will need to identify how your services will ensure equality and diversity, including:

- How the range of services your agency provides are made as accessible as possible, including where and how these are publicised together with your policy commitment to equality and diversity.
- How and to what extent you monitor the profile of service users and types of enquiries and how you use this data to target services and improve practice.
- Consultation with service users and any campaigning or social policy work your agency undertakes.
- Your procedures for challenging discriminatory behaviour from and towards service users, as well as the grounds and processes for withdrawing services.
- Your procedures to support service users to make complaints.

Monitoring, Evaluating & Reviewing

Monitoring and reviewing the operation of your services will help to demonstrate and consider your effectiveness in meeting the needs of the community you serve. The policy will therefore also need to identify:

- How you will plan, implement and monitor your Equality & Diversity procedures, for example by appointing a working party. Your process should help you to see how the policy is working and enable any necessary revisions.
- Who is responsible for monitoring, evaluating and reviewing and how often checks are made. For example, determining who collects and analyses information about recruitment and workforce composition (paid and voluntary) and about your service users, and how you use this to make proposals for revising procedures.

Action plan

To back up your policy and demonstrate that it is not simply a piece of window dressing, it is good practice to develop an action plan. This enables equality to be part of the objectives and responsibilities of named individuals by identifying the key tasks to be tackled i.e. what will be done, by when and by whom.

Useful reading and contacts

The Law

While you do not need to detail the legislation in your policy, you will need to have regard to it. Relevant legislation includes Race Relations Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Disability Discrimination Act and, more recently, the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations and The Equality Act 2006. Youth Access has developed a resource list of the relevant documents, which is available to download at: www.youthaccess

Key organisations

Commission for Racial Equality* St Dunstan's House 201 – 211 Borough High Street London SE1 1GZ website: www.cre.gov.uk Tel 020 7939 0000	Equal Opportunities Commission* Arndale House Arndale Centre Manchester M4 3EQ website: www.eoc.org.uk Help line 0845 601 5901
The Disability Rights Commission* DCR Helpline Freepost MID 02164 Stratford – upon – Avon Cv37 9BR website: www.drc.org.uk Tel 08457 622633	Equality & Diversity Forum c/o Third Age Employment Network (TAEN) 207 – 221 Pentonville Road London N1 9UZ website: www.edf.org.uk Tel: 0207843 1597
ACAS National Brandon house 180 Borough High Street London SE1 1LW website: www.acas.or.uk helpline: 08457 474747	ACAS Equality Direct Helpline Tel 08456 003444 website www.acas.org.uk/services/equality_direct.html
Lesbian & Gay Employment Rights Leroy House, 436 Essex Road, London N1 3QP Tel. 0207 704 6066	Other useful websites Department of Trade & Industry www.dti.gov.uk/er Multifaihtnet www.multifaihtnet.org Stonewall www.stonewall.org.uk

***Please note:** there are plans to merge the DRC, the EOC and the CRE into a single body, the Commission for Equality and Human Rights, from October 2007 – www.cehr.org.uk