

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium

Equal Opportunities Policy

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1 Introduction

Armagh Observatory and Planetarium (AOP) is an Equal Opportunity Employer, committed to ensuring that the talents and resources of all members of the organisation are utilised to the full.

The objective of this policy is to promote equality of opportunity and fair participation, and to ensure that the organization will not discriminate directly or indirectly on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion, trade union membership, gender, gender reassignment, marital status, sexual orientation, age, disability, nationality, race, colour or ethnic origin (Protected Characteristics), against any member of staff, full-time or part-time, or job applicant, actual or potential, in any aspect of the organisation's activities, including matters of recruitment, training, promotion, appointment, nomination or selection for any position, job transfer or redundancy. Any member of staff, full-time or part-time, who fails to comply with this Policy may be liable for disciplinary action which in serious cases may result in dismissal.

2 Definitions

2.1 Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another on the grounds of a Protected Characteristic.

2.2 Indirect discrimination can occur when a provision, criterion or practice which cannot be justified is applied equally but has the effect in practice of disadvantaging a considerably higher proportion of persons irrespective of a Protected Characteristic.

To establish a complaint of indirect discrimination, the complainant must show that:

- a provision, criterion or practice has been applied;
- the said provision, criterion or practice has had an adverse impact against the person because of his or her Protected Characteristic; and
- he or she has suffered detriment by reason of being unable to comply with the provision, criterion or practice.

2.3 Disability discrimination occurs when, for a reason related to a disability, a disabled person is treated less favourably than one who is not disabled, and this treatment cannot be justified. It also occurs when an employer fails to make reasonable adjustments in relation to the disabled person and the failure cannot be justified.

An employer cannot justify less favourable treatment if, by making a reasonable adjustment, it would remove the reason for the treatment.

2.4 Victimization occurs when a person is treated less favourably than another because that person has, for example, asserted rights under any of the current discrimination laws, for example fair employment, sex discrimination, race relations, or disability, age and sexual orientation legislation; has helped another person to assert such rights; given information to the relevant statutory body; has alleged that an act has been committed contrary to the relevant discrimination legislation; or because it is suspected that the person might do any of these things.

2.5 Harassment: this includes sexual harassment and other unwanted conduct related to a Protected Characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating someone's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them.

3 Policy

3.1 In order to achieve the objectives of the Equal Opportunities Policy, AOP is party to and supports and displays a Joint Declaration of Protection between the organisation and the recognised Trade Unions, UNITE and NIPSA.

3.2 Management will also:

- appoint an Equal Opportunities Officer, in this case the Head of Corporate Services, who will monitor all aspects of the Equal Opportunities Policy and its implementation;
- actively promote equality of opportunity under any appropriate legislation and any relevant statutory code of practice, and in addition to these legal requirements fulfil its moral and social obligations within the community to promote equality of opportunity irrespective of religious belief, political opinion, trade union membership, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, colour or ethnic origin;
- publicise the Equal Opportunity Policy throughout the organisation and make it known to job applicants, actual or potential and include awareness of it as part of Induction arrangements;
- establish policies and procedures to promote equality of opportunity, covering areas such as recruitment or selection for any position, training, promotion, job transfer or redundancy;
- provide facilities for any member of the organisation who believes that he or she has been treated unfairly within the scope of this policy to raise the matter through the individual Grievance Procedure or Dignity at Work Procedure.
- advise any member of the organisation who wishes to raise a complaint under the procedures contained in this policy that the procedures will not affect his or her statutory rights.

3.3 Any member of the organisation pursuing such statutory rights should note that there are time limits which can be very relevant, and which are set out in detail in the appropriate statutory enactments.

- Complaints of discrimination on grounds of religious belief, political opinion, trade union membership, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, colour or ethnic origin should be lodged with the industrial tribunal within three months from the date of the alleged act of discrimination.
- In respect of equal pay, the complaint can be lodged to the industrial tribunal at any time up to six months after leaving employment with the employer.
- Complaints to a fair employment tribunal must be lodged within three months of the time from which a complainant first knew, or might reasonably have known, of the act of discrimination, or within six months from the date when the act of discrimination first occurred, whichever is earlier.

It is important to note that time limits may change from time to time, and therefore anyone who wishes to raise a complaint should seek further advice on time limits from the Head of Corporate Services and other, independent sources.

3.4 AOP is committed to the maintenance of a good and harmonious working environment in which no person feels under threat or intimidation. Activities likely to give offence or cause apprehension to any member of staff or applicant for employment, actual or potential, on the grounds of religious belief, political opinion,

trade union membership, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, age, disability, race, colour or ethnic origin are therefore not permitted. Such activities may include:

- the display of certain flags, emblems, graffiti, and certain kinds of posters which would detrimentally effect good relations;
- the circulation, by whatever means, of images or written material which could cause offence; and
- the deliberate articulation of offensive slogans or songs.

AOP retains the right to adopt lawful, affirmative positive-action measures to redress any potential under-representation of a particular group in a specific area of work. Such measures may include setting goals and timetables, where appropriate, and special encouragement to certain groups in advertisements or special training.

4 Responsibilities

4.1 All members of the organisation have a responsibility to promote and ensure equality of opportunity, to prevent direct or indirect discrimination, and to prevent any form of harassment or victimization.

4.2 Management will ensure that all recruitment, selection and appointment procedures comply with this Equal Opportunities Policy, so that no person shall be disadvantaged by any provision, criterion or practice which is neither justified nor required for the job.

4.3 Specific responsibilities fall upon those involved in recruitment, selection and employee administration for ensuring that this policy is implemented.

4.4 The Equal Opportunities Officer is responsible for the provision of advice, training, and day-to-day operation and implementation of the policy, and for reviews of its effectiveness.

5 Monitoring and Review

5.1 AOP is a 'registered concern' within the meaning of the Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998.

5.2 AOP will monitor the community background and gender composition of all members of staff and job applicants, and will provide appropriate information concerning the composition of the workforce, applicants for employment, and appointees to the recognised Trade Union on request.

5.3 In addition, to maintain the effectiveness of this Policy, AOP will also monitor the ethnic background and status as a disabled person (and other protected characteristics as deemed appropriate) of all full-time and part-time employees, and job applicants.

5.4 Management will consult from time to time with the recognised Trade Unions with a view to reaching agreement to ensure that the Equal Opportunities Policy and all employment procedures and practices contained therein continue to be relevant and effective in the light of any developments in employment

legislation, industrial relations best practice, or the changing needs of the organisation and its employees, and will modify their provisions where necessary.