



# **Equity & Diversity Policy**

**September 2021**

## EQUITY AND DIVERSITY POLICY

### Introduction

The YMCA is a worldwide, Christian movement with a hundred and seventy-seven-year history. As part of this movement Belfast YMCA adopts its foundational documents, the Paris Basis and Kampala Principles<sup>1</sup>. Responding to its own situation, the YMCA Movement in Ireland has itself adopted foundational statements at key points in its development, including the Anti-Sectarian statement and Cross-Denominational Statement. Together these documents provide a backdrop to Belfast YMCA's approach to all its work.

The YMCA Ireland Christian Emphasis policy and accompanying set of guidelines attempt to translate the term "*extension of His kingdom*" (Paris Basis) into a language, which is accessible and understood by those who make up the organisation today. They seek to set out a set of practical principles and guidelines, which will assist in applying the Christian Emphasis policy to practice.

The following are the key elements of YMCA Ireland's Christian Emphasis policy:

1. The YMCA is committed to a Christian social action model, which attempts to show Christ's love in practical ways to children, young people, vulnerable adults, families and others in need in our local communities;
2. The YMCA is committed to building a community of Christians that celebrates the diversity of Christian experience among its staff, volunteers and participants;
3. The YMCA seeks to apply Christian values to all aspects of its work; and,
4. The YMCA sees the Christian faith as a personal journey, which takes place within the context of a wider faith community.

From this context the YMCA recognises the need for and supports wholeheartedly a policy of equality, inclusion and diversity in all areas of its work and responsibilities.

In addition, the YMCA Anti-Sectarianism Policy commits the Association particularly to equality for all sections of the community across the religious/political/cultural divisions in Ireland.

No condition or requirement will be applied to any applicant for employment or any staff member in the course of his/her employment which is, or may be, unlawfully, unfairly or unreasonably to their disadvantage on the grounds of religious or political belief, race, gender, marital status, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnic origins, or age or be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be justified within the aims and purposes of the YMCA.

Similarly, no condition or requirement will be applied to any participant in the course of his/her access to any service or programme which is, or may be, unlawfully, unfairly or unreasonably to their disadvantage on the grounds of religious or political belief, race,

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<sup>1</sup> Copies of the Paris Basis and the Kampala Principles are available in the Employee and Volunteer Handbooks..

gender, marital status, disability, nationality, sexual orientation, ethnic origins, or age or be disadvantaged by conditions or requirements which cannot be justified within the aims and purposes of the YMCA.

Entry to employment and promotion or change of post within the YMCA is determined by personal merit and ability relevant to the aims and purposes of the YMCA.

The aims and purposes of the YMCA commit the Movement to further the work of Christ in the world. As an ecumenical Christian Movement certain posts are deemed as being central or core to ensuring that the Christian emphasis is reflected in practice. These posts are referred to as Strategic Management Posts (SMPs) – see Christian Emphasis policy. Within each Strategic Management Post the ‘essential nature of the job’ (Northern Ireland legislation) pertaining to Christian faith commitment will be outlined in the job description.

If a member of staff or a volunteer believes that he/she has been discriminated against it is his/her responsibility to report the matter to his/her immediate line manager or to the most appropriate person in authority.

Similarly, if a programme participant believes that he/she has been discriminated against, then he/she should report their complaint in line with Belfast YMCA’s Complaints policy. It is the policy of Belfast YMCA that all such complaints will be treated with confidentiality, dealt with in a fair and reasonable manner and responded to promptly.

Sexual, racial and sectarian harassment, disability and ageism are forms of discrimination on the grounds of a person’s gender, sexual orientation, race or political/religious beliefs, disability and age. All allegations of discrimination will be treated seriously by the YMCA.

Such harassment is totally unacceptable to the YMCA and any such behaviour is considered to be a disciplinary offence. All allegations of sexual, racial and sectarian harassment, disability or ageism are treated seriously and all reasonable practicable steps will be taken to prevent the behaviour continuing.

All staff and volunteers are required to comply with the YMCA policy of not permitting the display of flags, emblems, posters, graffiti etc. or the circulation of literature, which is likely to give offence or cause apprehension among particular groups of staff, volunteers and/or service users.

It is the responsibility of every individual within Belfast YMCA, whether staff, management, volunteers or participants to eliminate discrimination and to ensure the practical application of this policy.

## **Guiding Principles and Core Values**

The following principles and values form the basis from which this policy has been developed and is implemented within Belfast YMCA.

**Equality:** Belfast YMCA believes that **everybody** is of equal value and deserves equal respect, dignity and opportunity. We believe that Equality is based on the following four key objectives:

1. Access to services;
2. Inclusion in decision making and shaping one's own community;
3. Relationships based on love, care, respect and solidarity; and,
4. Acknowledgement of diversity and the right to social status.

**Inclusion:** Within Belfast YMCA inclusion is understood as identifying, understanding and removing barriers that exist to ensure participation and belonging of all our staff, volunteers and participants. This involves:

- Openness and dialogue;
- A willingness to change; and,
- A commitment to equality.

**Equity:** Equity, similar to inclusion, ensures that all staff, volunteers and participants deserve equality of outcome regardless of background. It is about making sure that staff and participants are not directly or indirectly excluded and that positive steps are taken to include those who might otherwise feel excluded.

**Diversity:** Within Belfast YMCA, diversity encourages respect for and expression of the range of identities represented by all the participants involved in our programmes and services and those who work with them.

### **Statement of Belfast YMCA's Commitment to Equality and Inclusion**

The aim of this policy is to communicate the commitment of the General Secretary/CEO, Board of Directors and senior management team to the promotion of equality and diversity in Belfast YMCA.

It is our policy to provide employment equality to all, taking into consideration our obligations under the legislation outlined and to provide equality of access and engagement within our services and programmes.

We are committed to:

- Promoting equality of opportunity for all persons;
- Promoting a fair and harmonious environment for employment, volunteering and receipt of services in which all persons are treated with respect;
- Preventing occurrences of unlawful direct discrimination, indirect discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- Fulfilling all our legal obligations under equality legislation and associated codes of practice;
- Complying with our own Equity and Diversity policy, as well as associated policies;
- Taking lawful affirmative or positive action, where appropriate; and,
- Regarding all breaches of our Equity and Diversity policy as misconduct, which could lead to disciplinary proceedings.

## **Responsibilities and Implementation**

The General Secretary/CEO has specific responsibility for the effective implementation of this policy. Each director, manager and supervisor also has responsibilities and we expect all our staff and volunteers to abide by the policy and help create the equality environment which is its objective.

In order to implement this policy we will:

- Communicate the policy to employees, job applicants, volunteers and relevant others (such as contract or agency workers);
- Incorporate specific and appropriate duties in respect of implementing the equality and diversity policy;
- Provide equality training and guidance as appropriate, including training on induction and management courses;
- Ensure that those who are involved in assessing candidates for recruitment or promotion will be trained in non-discriminatory selection techniques;
- Incorporate equality, inclusion and diversity opportunity notices into general communications practices (e.g. staff newsletters, intranet, publications and programme recruitment materials);
- Obtain commitments from other persons or organisations such as subcontractors or agencies that they too will comply with the policy in their dealings with our organisation and our workforce; and,
- Ensure that adequate resources are made available to fulfil the objectives of the policy.
- Identify and align our programmes to the outcomes given in the Northern Ireland Executive's Outcomes Delivery Plan (2019)

We are opposed to all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination. All job applicants, employees, volunteers and others who work for us will be treated fairly and will not be discriminated against on any of the above grounds.

Decisions about recruitment and selection, promotion, training or any other benefit, whether it be for staff or programme participants, will be made objectively and without unlawful discrimination.

We recognise that the provision of equality and diversity within all aspects of Belfast YMCA, is core to our ethos and value base. Our Equity and Diversity policy will help all those who work for us or who participate in our services and programmes, to develop their full potential.

### **To whom does the policy apply?**

Belfast YMCA's Equity and Diversity policy applies to all those who work for the organisation (paid or unpaid) as well as to the participants who we engage in our programmes and services

## Equality Legislation and Definitions

This policy takes into consideration the following equality legislation pertinent to Northern Ireland:

- Section 75 (a), which requires public bodies to have due regard to the need for promoting equality of opportunity across nine equality grounds:
  - age,
  - racial group,
  - marital status
  - sexual orientation;
  - between men and women generally;
  - between persons of different religious belief,
  - between persons of different political opinion,
  - between persons with a disability and persons without; and,
  - between persons with dependants and persons without.

Other relevant equality legislation, which protects young people and adults through the provision of education and services, includes:

- Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 (as amended);
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended);
- Special Education Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005 (as amended);
- Sex Discrimination (NI) Order 1976 (as amended);
- Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2006 (as amended); and,
- Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 (as amended).

This policy also takes into account the 'Together: Building a United Community' (T:BUC) Strategy 2013 and its priorities.

The following definitions are also recognised by Belfast YMCA's Board of Management, and reflect the context of this policy.

### Discrimination

Discrimination is treating a person less favourably than another person. It includes making distinctions between people and denying them opportunities on the grounds of issues other than ability or qualifications; for example, their gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, disability, family circumstances etc.

Under equality legislation there are three main kinds of discrimination:

- 1 **Direct** (e.g. refusing someone a service, being hostile to an individual because of an aspect of their identity). Direct discrimination occurs when a person receives less favourable treatment, or a less favourable outcome, than another person in the same situation would have received on the grounds of their identity under the nine grounds.

- 2 **Indirect** (e.g. creating barriers to an individual's participation in a programme or service). Indirect discrimination occurs when a seemingly neutral policy or requirement actually has an adverse impact on a person from a minority background. Indirect discrimination can be unintentional. It can happen when services fail to take into consideration that different groups of people have different needs. Treating people with different needs the same can have the effect of being an indirect form of discrimination. For example, failing to provide for the mobility needs, such as providing wheelchair ramps, for people who are wheelchair users is a form of indirect discrimination that is fundamentally inequitable as it clearly denies access to those people.
- 3 **By Association** – a person is discriminated against not because of their identity or status but because of their association with someone else (e.g. treating someone unfavourably because they are a family member or friend of a gay person, member of the Traveller community, person with a disability etc). N.B. In Northern Ireland, this would be known in equality legislation as 'Victimisation'.

## **Harassment**

Harassment is any form of unwanted conduct related to any of the discriminatory grounds that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity and creating a hostile, humiliating or offensive environment for the person.

Harassment, including sexual harassment, on any of the nine grounds is prohibited. This prohibition applies to all aspects of Belfast YMCA's service provision, in one-to-ones, in group programmes, in drop-ins, in trips and activities, and so on.

The management of Belfast YMCA will not permit any person or participant to be harassed or to be sexually harassed because of their identity or status linked to the nine grounds. Belfast YMCA also recognises that harassment applies to both the actions of staff and volunteers, and those of participants.

## **Positive Action (Affirmative Action)**

Positive action occurs when measures are taken to correct an unequal state of affairs, for example where equality of outcome has been verifiably absent because of discrimination in the past. Examples would be where previously under-represented groups (such as women) are deliberately targeted.

Under Section 75 of the NI Act 1998, Public Authorities are 'bound' to have regard to the need for affirmative action (positive action) when considering their duty under the clause.

## **Complaints**

Employees who believe that they have suffered any form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation are entitled to raise the matter through the agreed Grievance Procedure, which is outlined in the Employee Handbook. All complaints of discrimination will be dealt with seriously, promptly and confidentially.

In addition to our internal procedures, employees have the right to pursue complaints of discrimination to an industrial tribunal or the Fair Employment Tribunal under the following anti-discrimination legislation:

- Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976, as amended;
- Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended;
- Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997, as amended;
- Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (NI) 2003;
- Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998, as amended;
- Employment Equality (Age) Regulations (NI) 2006; and,
- Equal Pay Act (NI) 1970, as amended.

However, employees wishing to make a complaint to a tribunal will normally be required to raise their complaint under our internal grievance procedures first.

Every effort will be made to ensure that employees who make complaints will not be victimised. Any complaint of victimisation will be dealt with seriously, promptly and confidentially. Victimisation will result in disciplinary action and may warrant dismissal.

Participants of our programmes and services, who feel that they have a complaint, should refer to Belfast YMCA's Complaints Policy and/or the relevant Service User Handbook.

### **Monitoring and review**

We will establish appropriate information and monitoring systems to assist the effective implementation of our equality and diversity policy.