

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION POLICY

Applicable to staff, students, customers and the general public using University Centre Somerset (UCS) College Group from 1 August 2025

Last Review Date: August 2025

By: Executive Director of People and Culture and Vice Principal Student Experience and DSL

Reviewed by SLT and approved by Full Governing Body

Next Review Date: August 2026

EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

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EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy demonstrates the commitment of the University Centre Somerset College Group, (UCS College Group) to equality of opportunity for staff, students and other people and sets out our equality principles.
- 1.2 Our ambition is to be 'an inclusive learning organisation acting as a catalyst for positive change' (Strategic Planning Framework 2022-27). We will seek to promote a positive culture and behaviours and seek to eradicate discrimination and harassment.
- 1.3 UCS College Group will create a culture of zero tolerance towards sexual harassment and all harassment and will seek to provide exemplary support for its victims.
- 1.4 Our UCS College Group Values set out how we work and behave. Together we are:
 - Passionate and excited about learning
 - Inclusive and supportive
 - Responsive to learner, employer and community needs
 - Always aspiring to the highest standards
 - Professional and enterprising
 - Innovative and creative
 - Friendly and welcoming

2. PURPOSE

- 2.1 UCS College Group is fully committed to promoting, maintaining and supporting equality and diversity in all aspects of its work. The UCS College Group aims to create an environment where all individuals have the opportunity to achieve their full potential, and gain a feeling of self-esteem and respect for and from all others. The UCS College Group expresses its opposition to all forms of inequality and discrimination.
- 2.2 The UCS College Group has statutory duties under UK law to promote equality of opportunity between people from protected groups. Full details of the statutory duties are available in the Single Equality Scheme.
- 2.3 This policy assists the UCS College Group to put its commitment into practice. Staff adherence to this policy should ensure that employees do not commit unlawful acts of discrimination or inequality.
- 2.4 In the current year steps will be taken to ensure staff and students from all protected characteristics feel listened to, have a sense of belonging, and that a continual programme of events creates a culture that is more aware of inclusion and diversity and celebrates events in the calendar of different faiths and cultures.

3. SCOPE

- 3.1 This policy applies to staff, students, employers, customers and suppliers. It applies to anyone who uses the UCS College Group at any point in time, including students based in the workplace and students and staff working online or remotely. Everyone should expect to be treated equally according to need, with dignity and respect and without being subjected to discrimination or harassment.

4. EDI AT UCS COLLEGE GROUP

4.1 UCS College Group works positively and progressively to ensure that no policy, practice, procedure or action puts any group of people at an unfair advantage or supports discrimination. In 2022 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion became a cross-cutting theme in the College Group's Strategic Planning Framework.

4.2 In particular the UCS College Group acknowledges that it is unlawful to discriminate directly or indirectly against employees and potential employees, students and potential students, and any other stakeholders of the UCS College Group, who have one or more of the nine 'protected characteristics' defined in the Equality Act 2010.

4.3 The 9 protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Race including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity

4.4 UCS College Group will not tolerate any acts of unlawful discrimination by any users of the UCS College Group and will take appropriate action, as laid down in its policies and procedures, if it is made aware that an unlawful act, or possible unlawful act, has been committed.

4.5 There are limited circumstances, referred to as 'Genuine Occupational Qualification', when an employer such as the UCS College Group can, in certain circumstances, advertise for and recruit a person from a particular protected characteristic because of the particular requirements of a specific job role. For example, a female Learning Support Assistant may be recruited to support female students with personal care needs.

4.6 The categories of discrimination as listed in the Equality Act 2010 are:

i) Direct discrimination

Where a person is treated less favourably than another because of a protected characteristic.

ii) Indirect discrimination

Where a provision, criterion or practice is applied that is discriminatory in relation to individuals who have a relevant protected characteristic such that it would be to the detriment of people who share that protected characteristic compared with people who do not, and it cannot be shown to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

iii) Harassment

Where there is unwanted conduct, related to one of the protected characteristics that has the purpose or effect of violating a person's dignity; or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment may apply either directly or indirectly to customers, clients, staff or students because of one of the protected characteristics

iv) Associative discrimination

Where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed for association with another individual who has a protected characteristic.

v) Perceptive discrimination

Where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed based on a perception that they have a particular protected characteristic when they do not, in fact, have that protected characteristic.

vi) Victimization

Where an employee is subjected to a detriment, such as being denied a training opportunity or a promotion because they have made or supported a complaint or raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because they are suspected of doing so. However, an employee is not protected from victimisation if they acted maliciously or made or supported an untrue complaint

- 4.7 The protected characteristics of marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity are not currently covered in the areas of:
- Harassment
 - Associative discrimination
 - Perceptive discrimination
- 4.8 UCS College Group staff will not discriminate or harass a customer or member of the public in the provision of goods, facilities or services.
- 4.9 We will make reasonable adjustments to overcome barriers to using services caused by disability. A reasonable adjustment may include the removal, adaptation or alteration of physical features (as long as this is not unreasonably difficult).
- 4.10 Staff who feel they have experienced harassment or bullying by students, customers, suppliers, or visitors should notify their manager, or if this is not possible, speak to People & Culture. Students who have experienced harassment should speak to their Personal Tutor or any Safeguarding Officer.
- 4.11 Promoting equality of opportunity is important at UCS College Group and integrated into all activities undertaken within the College Group, from Strategic and Operational Planning, development, delivery and assessment of curriculum, and recruitment and employment of staff. We also ensure equality of opportunity is an integral part of new ventures, such as design and build of new facilities and engagement of contractors.
- 4.12 The UCS College Group is committed to seeking to reduce any gender pay gap and will report on progress towards this annually.
- 4.13 The UCS College Group and University Centre Somerset have adopted, and fully support, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance Working Definition of Antisemitism:

'Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities'

The UCS College Group also confirms that it has zero tolerance towards discrimination or hatred directed at all other faiths.

- 4.14 The College also seeks to raise awareness of the nine protected characteristics and will seek opportunities to widen awareness, and celebrate the diversity, of the College Group community and wider world.
- 4.15 The EDI agenda is progressed at the College Group principally through the EDI Committee (Link Governor, Staff and Students). The College Group actively promotes Staff Networks and students are always welcome to run clubs and societies based on their personal preferences.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- 5.1 All members of the UCS College Group community have a responsibility to work towards equality of opportunity for all the protected characteristics, by ensuring equal opportunities and valuing the diversity of others.
- 5.2 All staff have a responsibility to work co-operatively with others at all times. Individual members of staff can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the College Group for any act of unlawful discrimination. Staff who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence. Acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation against others are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under the College Group's disciplinary policy. Discrimination, harassment, bullying or harassment may constitute gross misconduct and could lead to dismissal without notice.
- 5.3 Specific responsibilities for EDI are set out for groups of staff:
- **Governors** will ensure that the UCS College Group meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. A link governor will attend EDI Committee meetings.
 - **The Senior Leadership Team** will lead by example, demonstrate the principles of equality & diversity and seek good practice from managers and staff across the UCS College Group and specifically within their Area. They will also oversee progress against the cross-cutting EDI theme in Operating Plans.
 - The Vice Principal of **Student Experience and DSL** will seek to develop partnerships with organisations and regional groups supporting different protected characteristics and ensure such groups can support the College Group Community, and themselves gain the support of the UCS College Group.
 - **The College Group Management Team** will establish good working relationships with all staff within their teams and respond to any issues that arise in terms of staff or student concerns. Managers will manage staff in an equal, fair and appropriate way to ensure no form of favouritism, discrimination or unfair advantage is permitted.
 - **People Management** will ensure that procedures for the recruitment and promotion of staff encompass best practice at all times within equal opportunities legislative requirements, monitor and act on employee protected characteristics data, and provide equality and diversity training for staff
 - **Teaching and training staff** will demonstrate the principles of equality & diversity and how we are fair and supportive to all people, irrespective of who

they are. Teaching and training staff will deliver materials to students which avoid stereotyping or discrimination and embed equality & diversity into their lessons.

- **Staff** will work harmoniously with all other staff, students, customers and other people and uphold the high standards expected of equality & diversity. Staff will report any concerns about equality issues so that action can be taken to ensure a supportive environment for staff, students and other people.
- **The Students' Union** will seek to raise awareness of diversity among students and reduce or remove all forms of discrimination.
- **Students** of the College are expected to adhere to the Professional Expectations, which seeks mutual respect for all and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs, and offers students' equality of opportunity regardless of protected characteristics

5.3 It is a specific responsibility of the UCS College Group EDI Committee, made up of the link governor for Equality and Diversity, staff from all areas of the UCS College Group, student representation from the Students' Union and chaired by the Director of Student Experience and DSL, to ensure that the EDI Action Plan is revised annually and all actions monitored towards implementation during the Academic year.

5.4 This Action Plan aims to broaden awareness of issues, ensure good practice in everything we do, enhance a sense of belonging for all protected characteristics, and meet the requirements of the Single Equality Scheme. Vice Principal of Student Experience and DSL reports on progress against the Action Plan to SLT and the Standards Committee of the College Group Governors.

6. **EQUALITY STATEMENTS**

6.1 UCS College Group promotes equality of opportunity to all staff and students in accordance with current legislation such as the Equality Act 2010, and will continue to review and amend this policy and our practices as required under legislation and case law.

6.2 UCS College Group believes in equality of opportunity in all its activities including the delivery of education and training, projects, employment and recruitment.

6.3 Wherever practicable the College will accommodate cultural and religious needs of students and staff within the constraints of operational requirements.

6.4 The University Centre Somerset will be supported to implement the aims of its Access and Participation Plan, which seeks to support under-represented groups into Higher Education.

7. **INDUCTION & STAFF DEVELOPMENT**

7.1 UCS College Group provides EDI e-learning for all staff and has the expectation that all staff complete the e-learning course within the first six months of employment, in order to pass through the Induction Review process.

7.2 Events and activities will be offered regularly to staff and students to promote awareness of diversity and a culture of understanding and belonging.

7.3 Further training in learning support and disability awareness is sourced for specific teams.

8. RECRUITMENT

8.1 RECRUITMENT OF STAFF

8.1.1 We recruit our staff from a variety of labour markets including local, regional, national and international communities. We have a range of methods for doing this including advertising in newspapers, noticeboards, specific journals, the internet and job centre plus.

8.1.2 We undertake equality monitoring on the protected characteristics to allow us to understand who our candidates are and which candidates progress to interview and job offer and to enable us to identify if there are any areas of concern within our recruitment processes which prevent or discourage candidates from any particular protected characteristic from applying or progressing through our recruitment process.

8.1.3 We hold the Disability Confident Standard and People Business Partners are the first point of call for staff with disabilities We liaise with the Access to Work Scheme, run by the Job Centre Plus service to identify, fund and seek specialist equipment for staff to ensure they can gain a job irrespective of if they have a disability or develop a disability during their working life with us.

8.1.4 The UCS College Group has a separate DBS and Rehabilitation of Offenders' Policy to support ex-offenders to fulfil an active part in society and move on with their lives after previous difficult times. We talk to our existing staff or new staff about any convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings they have ever received as part of recruitment and induction processes.

8.2 RECRUITMENT OF STUDENTS

8.2.1 We welcome student applications from all areas of the local, regional, national and international community. The Information, Advice and Guidance process enables students to select a course, suited to their level of ability and future aspirations, taking into account the relevant government funding stream, where appropriate.

8.2.2 Many students join us from the local secondary schools, while others have a particular interest in following a discrete area of provision and travel many miles to study with us (e.g. for Land-based studies or as a Residential student).

8.2.3 We undertake equality monitoring and analysis on the protected characteristics that we collect from our students to allow us to understand who our students are and how they have progressed throughout their studies. We will seek to increase the number of protected characteristics on which we collect data during the life of this policy.

8.2.4 We arrange appropriate learning support for our students who have learning difficulties and disabilities and who need tailored additional support in order to succeed in their studies.

8.2.5 We have been awarded the Highly Trusted Sponsor status, from UK Border Agency and therefore we take student applications from international communities. We have links with several countries across the world and work with the British Council and

UKVI (UK Visas and Immigration) to ensure international students join us in line with all relevant legislation.

8.2.6 A Fitness to Study Procedure seeks to treat students with criminal records fairly and rehabilitate them into education where it is safe to do so.

8.2.7 We work with our Student Union Equality and Diversity Officer to discuss how we can further support students from different backgrounds or with differing needs to good effect.

9. EQUALITY IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

9.1 We recognise that teaching, training and learning support staff have an important role to play in embedding EDI into their lessons and tutorials. We run training sessions for staff on how to embed EDI into lessons and materials and what behaviour on equality and diversity is appropriate in lessons.

9.2 Teaching, training and support staff are encouraged to deal with issues as they arise in lessons and to tackle prejudice, stereotyping, banter and negative behaviours about one or more minority groups (e.g. BME people, disabled people, immigrants, homosexual and transgender people and sexual banter and harassment).

9.3 Staff and governors are encouraged to undertake equality training during their employment, provided either by UCS College Group staff or external trainers

9.4 All new staff, as part of their induction, complete an EDI e-learning package, as referred to in section 7.2

9.5 UCS College Group has a clear expectation of the standard of working with staff, students and external individuals harmoniously with respect for everyone's needs and characteristics.

10. REVIEW OF POLICY

10.1 The Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy is reviewed in line with legislative changes and case law and is also formally reviewed on an annual basis.

10.2 The annual process used to review the policy is as follows:

- The Executive Director or People and Culture and the Vice Principal of Student Experience and DSL will review changes required
- The amended policy will be presented to the EDI Committee at an appropriate meeting for comment and consultation
- SLT will review the draft policy
- Governors will ratify the Policy at Full Board
- The final policy will be published and communicated to all staff.