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Subject	Equality and Diversity
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Policy

Linkage Community Trust is committed to supporting, developing and promoting **equality, diversity and inclusion** in all its practices, procedures and activities and aims to establish an inclusive culture, free from discrimination and based upon the values of dignity, courtesy and respect.

Linkage will support and develop the staff, people we support and student populations through providing all with access to facilities, services, personal and career development opportunities, employment and study based on equality.

Linkage is committed to eliminating discrimination and advancing equality on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief (including lack thereof), sex (gender), and sexual orientation and to fostering good relations between different groups. This commitment supports the organisational principles of the Trust and upholds the ethos of establishing a culture based on dignity, courtesy and respect.

Equally, Linkage is committed to creating a working environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination and will take seriously any such complaints during the Trust's work activities.

This policy builds upon the foundation of equality legislation and antidiscrimination guidance and strives, not only to comply with legal requirements, but to use these to ensure that the Trust exemplifies best practice.

The Trust values diversity and recognises that the organisation is greatly enhanced by the disparate range of backgrounds, experiences, views, beliefs and cultures represented within its staff, people we support and students. The Trust aims to embrace diversity in all its activities and proudly acknowledges that variety and difference are intrinsic to the wellbeing and future development of Linkage.

The Equality and Diversity policy underpins the Mission and Vision of Linkage Community Trust and is integral to the success of the Trust as a provider of care, education and employment services and an employer of choice.

This is an over-arching policy designed to outline the fundamental principles of the Trust's commitment to equality and diversity and will be supported by specific equality policies and action plans.

The policy applies to all people we support, students, to all applicants for posts with the Trust, to all staff employed on a full-time or part-time basis, to all staff on permanent or

temporary contracts, to agency staff, to volunteers and to sub- contractors undertaking work on the Trust's sites as well as to the Board of Trustees.

Legislative Background

Under Equality legislation it is unlawful to:

- Discriminate directly against anyone and treat them less favorably than others on the grounds of the protected characteristics of age (unless this can be justified as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim), disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and belief (including lack thereof), sex (gender) and sexual orientation. This also includes discrimination based on perception of the person e.g. a belief that someone is gay or a belief that someone is disabled even if this is not actually true.
- Discriminate against someone for reasons relating to their association with a person on the grounds of the protected characteristics of race, sexual orientation, religion or belief (including lack thereof), age, disability, gender reassignment and sex (gender), e.g. discriminating against an employee/learner because they have a disabled dependent.
- Discriminate indirectly against anyone by applying a criterion, provision or practice which disadvantages people with a protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion and belief (including lack thereof), sex (gender) and sexual orientation) unless the person applying the provision can justify it as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.
- Subject someone to harassment for reasons relating to age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion and belief (including lack thereof), sex (gender), and sexual orientation. This includes behaviour that an individual finds offensive on these grounds even if the behaviour is not directed at the individual.
- Managers should not take any of the above protected characteristics into account when making recruitment or employment decisions, with limited exceptions for disability (see below). This means that you cannot, for example:
 - Decide that you prefer a woman (or a man) for the post
 - Decide not to appoint an applicant because they are pregnant
 - Treat a person less favorably in any way due to their sexual orientation
 - Fail to appoint the best person for the job, due to their age (young or old).
- There is additional legislation that prohibits discrimination against other groups:
 - Part-time status (Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favorable Treatment) Regulations 2000)
 - Fixed-term status (Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favorable Treatment) Regulations 2002)

- Equal Pay between men and women (Equal Pay Act 1970).
- Victimise someone because they have made, or intend to make, a complaint or allegation or has given or intends to give evidence in relation to a complaint of discrimination in line with the Equality Act.

Objectives

The aim of this policy is to ensure that in carrying out its activities Linkage will have due regard to:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- Advancing equality of opportunity, across all the activities of the Trust, between different groups.
- Fostering good relations between people of a diverse background.

In the implementation of this policy Linkage will aim:

- To develop and promote a culture of equality, diversity and inclusion.
- To develop and promote a culture of dignity, courtesy and respect.
- To support all staff, people we support, including provision of relevant support relating to age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief (including lack thereof), sex (gender) and sexual orientation.
- To work to prevent all forms of unlawful discrimination.
- To deal with all forms of discrimination, bullying and harassment consistently and effectively.
- To ensure that the Equality and Diversity policy influences and informs the inclusive culture of the Trust.

Definitions

Equal opportunities refer to the elimination of unlawful and unfair direct and indirect discrimination of particular groups and promoting equal access, treatment and outcomes that take into account specific needs of individuals.

Diversity - Diversity encompasses visible and non-visible individual differences that includes, but is not limited to, differences protected by anti-discrimination legislation. Appreciating diversity is about valuing differences and recognising that everyone through their unique mixture of skills and experience has their own valuable contribution to make.

Inclusion – Being proactive to make sure that staff, people we support and students of different backgrounds, identities and experiences feel welcomed and included as well as being fully able to participate and respected. This will support the creation of a diverse environment and ensures a culture exists where individuals can be their full selves.

It is the aim of Linkage that individuals and groups within our organisation are not only treated based on equality, but that their diverse contributions to the educational, social and cultural life of the Trust are recognised and developed thus creating an inclusive workplace.

Roles and Responsibilities

It is incumbent upon all members of Linkage to behave with dignity, courtesy and respect and to act in a manner that does not unlawfully always discriminate.

Role of Trustees

- To ensure that Linkage's strategic plan and priorities focus on a commitment to equality.

Role of Executive Leadership Team

- To ensure the implementation of this policy across the Trust.
- To ensure that equality, diversity and inclusion issues are considered as part of the Trust's strategic and business planning processes.

Role of Managers

- To ensure the implementation of this policy within their service areas
- To ensure that all members of staff receive the appropriate equality, diversity and inclusion training.
- To investigate all matters of alleged discrimination, harassment and inappropriate behaviour promptly and thoroughly.
- To ensure that recruitment, selection and appointment procedures, pay and reward, performance management processes, staff development opportunities, and disciplinary and grievance processes are fairly and consistently applied to all staff.
- To treat all applications for flexible working on a fair and equitable basis and to provide reasonable and objective reasons when such requests must be refused.

Role of Staff

- Actively to encourage non-discriminatory practices and to report any incidences of behaviour that fail to comply with this policy.
- To support, promote and advance the aims of the Equality and Diversity policy.
- To undertake appropriate Equality and Diversity training.

Role of Students and People We Support

- Actively to encourage non-discriminatory practices and to report any incidences of behaviour that fail to comply with this policy.
- To support the aims of the Equality and Diversity policy.
- To be aware of equality and diversity issues.

Role of Human Resources

- To provide appropriate equality and diversity awareness and training for all staff.
- To support managers in implementing the policy.

- To ensure that recruitment, selection and appointment procedures, pay and reward, performance management processes, staff development opportunities, and disciplinary and grievance processes are fair and transparent and are consistently applied.
- To monitor employment equality data and to publish the findings of monitoring activity, as appropriate.

Breach of Policy

Contravention of the Equality and Diversity Policy will be treated as a disciplinary matter and offenders will be dealt with under the Disciplinary policy for staff or the appropriate Student / People We Support Behaviour policy. This policy should be read in conjunction with Dignity at Work, Bullying and Harassment, Discipline and Grievance, Safeguarding and Student Charter