

# An Equal Opportunities/Diversity Policy & Strategy Objectives for the Health Service





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## Strategy

“To ensure equal opportunities and to accommodate diversity in the workplace.”

All persons regardless of marital status, family status, race, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender and membership of the Traveller community will be provided with equality of access to employment in our service and also encouraged and assisted to achieve their full potential. All staff will be enabled to work in an environment which is harassment free and fully respectful of their dignity. This equality/diversity strategy is therefore concerned that all health service employment policies and practices are consistent with ensuring this objective.

### Context

There are a number of forces which have reinforced the dynamic for the strategic development and implementation of equal opportunities/diversity building on work already completed/underway. These include:

- n The Employment Equality Act, 1998
- n Equal Status Act, 2000
- n Commitments under social partnership
- n The 2002 Health Strategy (Quality and Fairness: A Health System for you) and future health and social policy
- n Increasing diversity both in society generally and in the workplace
- n Work/Life Balance



## Employment Equality Act, 1998

The Employment Equality Act, 1998 is designed to promote equality of opportunity in employment between employed persons by making discrimination and harassment in employment unlawful on the following grounds:

- n Marital Status
- n Family Status
- n Race
- n Religion
- n Age
- n Disability
- n Sexual Orientation
- n Gender
- n Membership of the Traveller Community

The Employment Equality Act, 1998 allows positive action in relation to certain groups, i.e. gender, membership of the Traveller community, people over the age of 50 and people with disabilities.

## Equal Status Act, 2000

The Equal Status Act 2000, aims to promote equality and prohibit discrimination and harassment and related behaviour in connection with the provision of goods and services, property and other opportunities to which the public generally or a section of the public has access, on similar grounds as those contained in the Employment Equality Act, 1998.

## Commitments Under Social Partnership

Sustaining Progress the social partnership agreement 2003-2005, reached between the Government and the social partners states that:

*“The public service is strongly committed to equality of opportunity in its employment practices and will continue to build on the significant progress which has been made in regard to policies on equality and diversity in order to promote equal opportunity in all aspects of civil and public service employment”<sup>1</sup>*

## The 2002 Health Strategy and Future Health and Social Policy

The 2002 Health Strategy – *Quality and Fairness: A Health System for you*, specifically commits the health service to equal opportunities as follows:

*Devise and implement best practice employment policies and procedures*

*To establish the health service as an employer of choice, health employers will be asked to:*

- *Establish a policy for managing diversity in the workplace. In line with the Employment Equality Act, 1998 and the Equal Status Act, 2000, this policy should challenge prejudice at all levels and provide practical support to enable everybody, regardless of gender, marital or family status, race, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation or membership of the Traveller community to work in the health system. Such a policy will incorporate:*
  - n *Policy, procedures, audit and training programmes*
  - n *Awareness-raising training programmes in relation to diversity, equality, bullying and harassment*
  - n *A mechanism for monitoring equality in relation to recruitment, selection and career development.<sup>2</sup>*

1 Department of the Taoiseach. *Sustaining Progress – Social Partnership Agreement 2003-2005*; Stationery Office, February 2003, pg 99.

2 Department of Health & Children. *Quality and Fairness – A Health System for you*; Stationery Office, Dublin; 2001, page 122



Under Article 108 of the Health Strategy the Action Plan for People Management (APPM) has been developed, which seeks to ensure that the health service has the right people, with the right competencies, in the right numbers, organised and managed in the right way, to deliver the goals and objectives of the Health Strategy. The APPM outlines activities to ensure equality and value diversity in the health service which includes;

- n Prepare an Equal Opportunities/Accommodating Diversity Strategy and Action Plan
- n Develop tools which will assist line managers in the equal opportunities/diversity aspect of their people management role
- n Finalise and roll-out Equality/Diversity guidelines and Dignity at Work policy
- n Mainstream Equality/Diversity training in the health services

## Diversity

Both Irish society and workplaces generally are becoming increasingly diverse, due to a number of factors such as higher participation of women in the work; increasing numbers of non-national workers; changing age profile of the workforce; etc. Accommodating diversity acknowledges differences and the different needs that employees have, depending on whether they are younger or older, male or female, have a disability, have family responsibilities, are of different ethnic backgrounds, etc. A positive, open and accommodating workplace generates an atmosphere which fosters high morale for a diverse range of employees and maximises their opportunity to reach their potential and contribute to high quality service delivery.

## Work/Life Balance

There are benefits to be achieved in enabling staff at every level in the organisation to combine employment, family life and life's choices. Employees' lives include work, family, personal responsibilities or choices and other commitments at different stages. Attendance arrangements should acknowledge and facilitate such choices where practicable, in the context of operational needs.



## Critical Success Factors

Equal opportunities/diversity must be an integral part of health and social services management and be endorsed by the Chief Executive Officer. Factors that will be critical to the successful implementation of an equal opportunities/diversity strategy in the health service include:

- n Senior management commitment
- n Demonstration and promotion of an equality culture
- n Line management responsibility
- n Improved awareness through effective communications and active promotion of equal opportunities/diversity
- n Equality/diversity training
- n Staff and trade union commitment

## Positive Benefits

Positive benefits to be achieved from the implementation of an equal opportunities/diversity strategy in the workplace include:

- n Attracting candidates from the widest possible pool of potential applicants
- n Retention of employees in whom the organisation has invested
- n Better integration of all groups into the workplace
- n More effective and efficient use of the skills, talents and capabilities available to an organisation
- n A work environment that is flexible and responsive to change
- n Increased staff motivation and commitment
- n Improved quality of working life
- n A workplace which is respectful of the dignity of all
- n A more positive reputation for an organisation as an employer



# An Equal Opportunities/ Diversity Policy Statement for the Health Service

Health service employers commit themselves to the following policy statement:

*As an equal opportunity employer, we treat all of our employees and potential employees equally, irrespective of gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community, in terms of recruitment and selection, pay, conditions, training, work experience and opportunities for career progression.*

## Senior Management Commitment

Senior management is committed to the active implementation of this equal opportunities/diversity strategy. This commitment includes securing and providing financial and other resources.

## Management Responsibility

Managers will be trained to enable them take responsibility for the equal opportunities/diversity aspect of their people management role. They will have responsibility for ensuring equal opportunities/diversity in the workplace and promoting an equal opportunities/diversity culture.

## The Human Resource Policies

Equal opportunities/diversity will be integral to all HR policies and training within the organisation. Equal opportunities/diversity developments and initiatives will be communicated to all staff.

# Objectives

The purpose of the equal opportunity/diversity policy is to create a workplace which provides for equal opportunities for all staff and potential staff and where their dignity is protected and respected at all times. This will require the development of practices and procedures which encompass the following aspects of employment:

- n Recruitment and selection
- n Training and work experience
- n Promotion and re-grading
- n Conditions of employment
- n Role of managers
- n Dignity at work
- n Positive action

## Recruitment & Selection

The objective is to target the widest possible pool of potential applicants and to ensure that all candidates have equality of access to health service positions. Recruitment methods, documentation and all associated publicity material will contain nothing of a discriminatory nature and will encourage applications from all potential candidates. Selection will be on merit and those who are successful shall demonstrate their suitability for appointment according to predetermined job-related selection criteria which will be consistently applied throughout the recruitment process. Equality of opportunity will also include accommodating where possible the special needs of individuals to facilitate their participation in the recruitment and selection process.

All aspects of the recruitment and selection process (job description and person specification; advertising; application forms/shortlisting; interviewing; pre-employment medical assessment) will be based on the principle of assessing the skills, qualities and attributes of applicants against those which have been determined to be required for effective performance of the job without regard to any of the nine grounds.



## Training and Work Experience

All employees will be afforded the same opportunities to develop full and rewarding careers. They will therefore be provided with every opportunity to acquire the range of training, skills and experience necessary for their career development.

Career opportunities are enhanced by gaining a broad range of experience in a variety of sections or job postings within the organisation. All employees will be made aware of, encouraged and facilitated to maximise their experience in the organisation's diverse activities.

Where practicable, training and work experience will be provided in a manner which will facilitate equality of access for all staff and employees will be selected for training or work experience without regard to any of the nine grounds. No member of staff will be denied access to training or work experience because of any of the nine grounds.

## Promotion or Re-grading

All categories of staff will be encouraged to prepare, plan and consider themselves for promotion. All eligible employees will be made aware of promotional opportunities and encouraged to compete. Conditions governing access to promotion competitions will not discriminate, directly or indirectly, on any of the nine grounds. Unnecessary barriers to promotion will be removed and employees facilitated to compete by all means possible. Competitions will be conducted in a manner which does not discriminate on any of the nine grounds. Promotion and regrading will be decided on objective criteria relevant to the objectives of the job and will not be influenced by any of the nine grounds.

## Conditions of Employment

All employees will be offered the same terms of employment; the same working conditions; and the same treatment, including treatment in relation to overtime, shiftwork, disciplinary measures, etc.

Induction will be used as an opportunity to discuss with new employees any special needs that they may have arising from one of the nine ground and to explore how these needs may be accommodated. Where practicable, measures will be taken to accommodate special needs arising from an employee's disability, race, family status or any other characteristic covered by the nine grounds. For example, requests for flexible working hours/atypical attendance regimes will be accommodated where practicable.



## Role of Managers

All managers will be trained and equipped to carry out the equal opportunities/ diversity aspects of their people management role.

All staff have an important role to play in ensuring equality of opportunity throughout the organisation. Managers have particular responsibility to engender respect for difference and to accommodate diversity where appropriate. Managers and supervisors will be provided with appropriate initial training followed by additional training at regular intervals. The training will include awareness of equality principles, legislation and case law, the managers role in implementing the equality/diversity policy and attitudinal and behavioural issues.

## Dignity at Work

All employees will be treated with dignity and respect and provided with a safe working environment which is free from all forms of bullying and harassment. The importance of the dignity and respect of all staff members at work will be promoted throughout the work place. The Dignity at Work Policy will be actively promulgated and implemented. Managers, trade union representatives will be trained in the operation of the policy. All employees have an obligation to prevent and eliminate harassment.

## Positive Action

The organisation will take all practical measures to facilitate the integration of the following categories into employment:

- n Gender
- n Persons over the age of 50 years
- n Persons with a disability
- n Membership of the Traveller community



## Implementation

The elements of this Equal Opportunity/Diversity Policy are elaborated in the 'Guide to Equal Opportunities/Accommodating Diversity' a document produced by the HSEA which aims to provide guidance to managers to assist them to meet their obligations under the equality legislation and also to give some practical examples of how to put the equal opportunities policy into action.

The provisions of this Guide and other appropriate actions will be further identified as part of an equality action plan on foot of this policy. The development and implementation of these actions will be carried out on an ongoing basis and will be dynamic to the extent that realisation of all of the objectives of the Equal Opportunity/Diversity Policy is ongoing.

## Monitoring/Periodic Review

Progress in the areas of equal opportunities/diversity will be gauged through the continuous monitoring of the implementation of the equal opportunities/diversity strategy.



