

GOL Equal Opportunities Policy

1. Every staff member of the Government Office for London has the right to equality of opportunity. This means:

the right to be treated fairly, regardless of their sex, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, age, marital status, disability or because of their working pattern (eg hours of attendance, part-time working, etc);

the right to be considered on merit for opportunities such as training, development and promotion;

the right to be given all practicable assistance to overcome problems at work which are associated with disability.

Legislation

2. This policy has evolved in line with legislation, and puts into effect within the Civil Service the provisions of such Acts of Parliament as the Employment Act 1989, the Employment Protection (Consolidation) Act 1978, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (as amended by the Sex Discrimination Act 1986), the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

3. Policy not based on law, such as sexual orientation or age, is as important and should be treated as seriously by the employer as areas where there is specific legislation.

Rights and Responsibilities

4. All staff will be treated solely on the basis of their ability, qualities and suitability for the work. There is an obligation on all GOL staff not to harass, or discriminate against, others, or to put pressure on another person (either by implying, offering or providing any benefit, or by threatening or causing any detriment) to do so. And equally, staff have the right to expect not to be harassed or discriminated against themselves.

5. Each individual has the responsibility to help create a working environment without discrimination or harassment; this includes behaving in a moderate and sensitive manner in dealings with colleagues, and making it clear that the same is expected of them.

6. It is a fundamental principle that managers are expected to be impartial in their dealings with staff and apply the same standards to all. Managers should not themselves behave in a way which might be thought discriminatory, and must not allow staff to be channelled into particular areas of work because of preconceptions about the ability of certain groups of people or because of assumptions about the reactions of other staff and/or members of the public.

7. In particular, managers should:

- be alert to the possibility that a person who has suffered discrimination or harassment may feel reluctant to take the matter up with the alleged offender(s), to make a complaint, or even to turn to colleagues for support;
- take prompt action to stop discrimination or harassment as soon as it is identified, making it clear to staff that this kind of behaviour is not acceptable and could be treated as a disciplinary matter;
- ensure that potentially offensive views are not expressed, or materials displayed or circulated, in the office.

Discrimination

8. 'Discrimination' means treating a person, on grounds of his/her sex, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, age, marital status, disability or working patterns, less favourably than others are or would be treated in the same or similar circumstances. It includes 'indirect discrimination', ie attaching a requirement or condition to an opportunity which, even though it may apply equally to all persons, excludes or puts at a disadvantage certain individuals or groups without any objective justification.

Unconscious Discrimination

9. While some types of discrimination are easily recognised, it is important that staff also guard against the more subtle forms that discrimination can take. These often result from general assumptions about the characteristics and interests of particular groups, and can occur without any conscious or deliberate intention to discriminate.

'Positive' Discrimination and Positive Action

10. 'Positive' discrimination (eg promoting someone because they are a woman or a member of an ethnic minority) is just as much against the law as 'negative' discrimination (eg not promoting someone because they are a woman or a member of an ethnic minority). However, positive action (for example, taking steps to encourage applications from under-represented groups or to provide training to help them compete on equal terms with the majority) is lawful, and may be considered where appropriate under the provisions of the Sex Discrimination and Race Relations Acts.

Harassment

11. 'Harassment' includes a range of behaviour which, whether intentional or not, creates feelings of unease, humiliation, intimidation or discomfort, causes offence or threatens (or appears to threaten) job security or career prospects. It may be a single incident or series of incidents. Some forms of harassment are obvious, such as bullying, physical assaults, demands for sexual favours or verbal threats or abuse, but others are more subtle and there is no simple definition. Harassment is discussed in more detail in Advice Note 7 and Departmental Staff Handbooks.

Complaints and Contacts

12. Any member of staff who believes that he/she has been subject to harassment or unfair discrimination, should talk to his/her line manager, personnel officer, staff counselling or welfare officer, trade union representative or Equal Opportunities Officer, Harassment Adviser or Disabled Persons' Officer as appropriate

13. Within GOL:

Equal Opportunity Liaison Officers are Siobhan Gregory, Floor 5, Tel. 020 7217 3105, and Sheelah Latham, Floor 5, Tel 020 7217 3546.

Disabled Persons' Officer is Sheelah Latham, Floor 5, Tel 020 7217 3546.

Harassment Adviser contacts are:

- Jane Lord, Floor 7 020 7217 3420
- Harvinder Mankoo, Floor 6 020 7217 3538

Staff should contact them for informal discussion of any matter relating to equal opportunities.

14. Where the matter cannot be dealt with locally, Departments' central Equal Opportunities Policy Units are the contact points for general advice on a wide range of equal opportunities issues. The Departmental Equal Opportunities Officers in the four parent Departments, who are listed below:

- DfES: Jennifer Knight, Human Resources Policy Division, Room 2U1, Sanctuary Buildings, Great Smith Street, LONDON SW1. GTN 3060 5449
- DEFRA: Julie Barlett, Equality and Diversity Unit, Room 207 Foss House, Kings Pool 1–2 Peasholme Green, York YO1 7PQ. GTN 5137 5125
- DTI: Veronica Johnson, EZH128 Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, SE1 7LJ GTN 2876 4725
- DfT: Martin Robinson, Equality and Diversity Unit, Zone 17/D Portland House, Stag Place, SW1E 5LP. GTN 3533 3205
- ODPM: Dipti Bhatt, Equality & Diversity Adviser, 3/B3 Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU. GTN 3533 3112

15. Complaints will always be taken seriously and dealt with promptly. Complaints may be dealt with internally on either a formal or informal basis. Staff also have the right to complain to an employment tribunal. A separate Advice Note will be issued on grievance procedures as soon as possible: in the meantime, staff should consult the appropriate Staff Handbook.

16. Where a complaint is found to be justified, the perpetrator may be subject to disciplinary proceedings, and in serious cases this can lead to dismissal. Staff guilty of sexual or racial

harassment may also render themselves personally liable under the Sex Discrimination or Race Relations Act as appropriate.

17. Discriminating against someone who has (or who is believed to have) brought or been involved in proceedings under the relevant legislation or Departmental complaints procedures, is victimization. This is also unlawful.

18. However, where a complaint is not upheld and is found to have been made maliciously or otherwise than in good faith, then the complainant could be subject to disciplinary proceedings.