

GQAL EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND ACCESS POLICY

Introduction

We live in a multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society. In line with a belief in the principles of social justice and the active promotion of genuine equal opportunities for all, GQAL has committed itself to a policy of equality of opportunity not only in employment and personnel practice, but also in its examination and assessment services.

This document outlines the GQAL Equal Opportunities Policy, its obligations under existing legislation and its intention to abide by and comply, not only with the requirements, but also the spirit of the legislation. GQAL will take steps to ensure that all future documents, procedures, codes of practice, management guidelines, and instructions to members, staff and contractors are developed in line with this policy.

GQAL is required to ensure that their equal opportunities and access policies conform with the principles set out in this document.

1. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY STATEMENT

GQAL opposes discrimination against and/or harassment of anyone because of their race, ethnic or national origin, gender, sexual orientation, marital status, disability, class, age, religion or employment status.

All GQAL employees, examiners, and students are required to comply with this policy statement.

Any complaints of discrimination or harassment will be treated seriously. They will be fully investigated and may result in disciplinary action by GQAL management or the Board of Directors.

Further policies and practices that promote equal opportunities will be developed, implemented and publicised by GQAL as required.

GQAL will provide briefing opportunities for all staff and examiner sub-contractors and members relating to the equal opportunities policy and its implementation.

2. THE LEGISLATIVE OBLIGATIONS

The GQAL Equal Opportunities Policy goes beyond the minimum standards but has been developed within the framework of existing legislation. The relevant Acts of Parliament are:

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (and its amendments, 1986)

The Equal Pay Act 1970 (and its amendments 1983)

The Race Relations Act 1976

The Disabled Persons (Employment) Acts 1944 & 1958

The Disabled Persons (Services, Consultation & Representation) Act 1986

The Chronically Sick & Disabled Persons Act 1970 (and its amendments 1976)

The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995

The Equality Act 2010

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE LEGISLATION

If the legal requirements of the above Acts are contravened both the GQAL and the individual concerned will be rendered liable to legal proceedings. If GQAL as employer can prove that it has taken the necessary steps to prevent acts of discrimination, only the individual would be considered liable for that unlawful act. This applies to the Race Relations Act 1976 and Sex Discrimination Act 1975/1986. It is essential that all persons bound by this Policy are aware of their obligations under the law, as ignorance is not a defence.

4. DEFINITION OF TERMS

Direct discrimination results from treating a person less favourably on grounds of gender, race, disability, colour, ethnic and national origin, nationality, sexuality, marital status, responsibility for dependants, religion, trade union activity or age.

Indirect discrimination arises when a condition or a requirement, although applied equally to the above groups listed in the policy statement, has the effect of excluding, penalising or treating less favourably, any of these groups and cannot be shown to be justifiable and will be to the detriment of those who cannot comply with it.

Victimisation occurs if a person is given less favourable treatment than others because she/he has exercised her/his rights under the policy of the relevant legislation. Harassment is defined as: "Any hostile or offensive act, deliberate or otherwise, or any unwelcome attention against an individual or group; any incitement to commit such acts; any actions which affect a person's safety or comfort or which demean that person in any way". The following list provides examples of acts that might occur in incidents of harassment:

- physical assault and abuse;
- verbal threat and abuse;
- unwelcome physical contact;
- derogatory name-calling, insults, demeaning jokes;
- offensive comments;
- incitement of others to behave in an oppressive manner;
- provocative behaviour, mimicry;
- refusal to co-operate in accepted GQAL activities;
- with other people on grounds of their race, gender;
- sexual orientation, marital status, disability, class;
- age, religion or employment status;
- wearing of racist or sexist badges or insignia;
- graffiti directed against an individual or vulnerable group;
- displaying or distributing leaflets etc containing offensive material;
- attempting to recruit other users, staff or students;
- to racist organisations or groups.

5. GENERAL POLICY

5.1 ACCESS

All entry requirements or qualifications for the GQAL programmes will relate to standards specified by GQAL. All GQAL centres must ensure that all potential candidates who meet the entrance qualifications have equal access to the GQAL awards. GQAL centres must not discriminate in providing access to opportunities and facilities for candidates.

5.2 MARKETING

An Equal Opportunities statement will appear in the GQAL publications. Publicity will avoid race and gender stereotyping.

5.3 SYLLABUSES & EXAMINATIONS OFFERED

GQAL will seek to ensure that syllabuses and examinations' content complies with the equal opportunities policy and avoids stereotyping by using positive role models, accessible language and culturally diverse material.

5.4 STAFFING

All applicants will have equal access to employment opportunities, providing that they meet the requirements of the job description and person specification. GQAL will not discriminate in providing access to training, promotion and career development opportunities. Under-represented groups will be encouraged to apply for posts and to participate fully in the work of GQAL.

5.5 IMPLEMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION

Copies of the equal opportunities policy will be available to all GQAL members, staff and contractors. Further copies of the policy can be obtained from GQAL. All employees and contractors are to be briefed on the Policy at induction.

5.6 COMPLAINTS & GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE

A complaints procedure exists for the use and protection of all GQAL members, staff and contractors and is an appropriate way of raising and dealing with complaints relating to any breach of this policy. GQAL management will treat seriously and take prompt action on any grievance concerning discrimination, victimisation or harassment.

Grievance Procedure

Step 1 - Statement of Grievance

The employee must set out details of the grievance and send it to the company who will

investigate.

Step 2 - Meeting

The company will invite the employee to a meeting after there has been a reasonable time to consider the response to the information. After the meeting the employer must inform the employee of the decision and notify the employee that there is a right of appeal against the decision.

Step 3 - Appeal

If the employee wishes to appeal, he must inform the employer and a further meeting that the employee must take all reasonable steps to attend must be arranged. After the meeting the employer must inform the employee of the final decision.

5.7 DISCIPLINE

Acts of discrimination, victimisation and harassment as defined in this document, perpetrated by GQAL Members, staff and contractors against others, will result in disciplinary action. This will also apply to those who attempt to induce others to discriminate, victimise or harass.

Failure to comply with or adhere to the equal opportunities policy will be treated as a disciplinary offence.

5.8 POLICY REVIEW

No policy document can remain static and must be subject to changes. It is the intention of the GQAL management to keep this policy under review to ensure that the GQAL commitment to equality of opportunity, as set out in the Policy Statement, is adopted and fully implemented.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES MONITORING

The implementation of this will be monitored by the GQAL management and Board of Directors. GQAL monitors equality of opportunity and access to its qualifications through the following means:

1. Market research processes

GQAL will consult with learners, tutors, teachers and centres to keep under review the accessibility and manageability of its units and qualifications for learners and to ensure that these are continuing to meet learner needs.

Where market research processes identify the need for new units and qualifications, the Qualifications Development Committee will ensure that any equal opportunities and/or accessibility issues are taken into account as part of the market research to identify potential barriers for access so that these may be taken forward to the unit and rule of combination development process.

2. Consulting user groups

GQAL has many user groups that it regularly consults with and who provide valuable information regarding access to assessment, diversity and equality. These include:

- Centres - GQAL, through its Centres, can supply the organisation with information about potential barriers to assessment based on their experience of teaching learners.
- Examiners - The examiners that make up GQAL all bring with them a diverse range of expertise across a range of different subjects and disciplines. Examiners can feed back any issues to GQAL that they have identified in the operation of their qualifications.
- Other organisations - GQAL consults with other education and training organisations to ensure that any issues related to potential barriers to assessment can be identified.

3. Reasonable adjustment/special consideration

GQAL will monitor all requests for reasonable adjustment/special consideration to consider whether the amount and type of requests have a relationship to potential barriers to equality of opportunity and/or accessibility, which could be resolved through amendments and revisions to the format and structure of examinations and assessments and the quality assurance of assessments and examinations. If such a relationship is found, the Responsible Officer will:

- provide a report to the Examinations Standards Committee proposing changes to the format and structure of examinations and assessments or to the quality assurance processes to ensure that identified barriers were minimised. On agreement by the Examinations Standards Committee the proposed changes will be instituted within an appropriate timescale to cause minimum disruption to the assessment and awarding processes.
- Records of such instances will be kept and a report will be made in the self-assessment report about the number of instances this has occurred and what has been done to mitigate these.

4. Collection of other forms of data, which might impact upon equal opportunities

- GQAL collects data on age, gender and ethnicity through the registration process which it will monitor regularly to ensure that no groups are being disadvantaged or denied access.
- GQAL also collects data on disability through requests for reasonable adjustment and monitors these as detailed above.
- GQAL will monitor teachers on their compliance with the published equal opportunities policy to ensure that teachers are treating all learners fairly and that all learners have fair access to assessment and are not discriminated against in any way. Any teacher found not complying with the policy will be subject to malpractice investigations as part of the malpractice policy.
- GQAL will monitor its examiners and staff to ensure that they comply with the published equal opportunities policy. Any member of staff found to be not complying with the policy will be subject to disciplinary procedures.