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Owner and version control

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy

Scope and purpose of this policy

Best Practice Network is committed to advancing equality of opportunity, fostering inclusivity, and eliminating discrimination in all aspects of its work. We strive to create an environment where all individuals—including staff, associates, learners, apprentices, employers, trainees, visitors, and job applicants—are treated with dignity, respect, and fairness.

Equality Statement

At Best Practice Network, we believe that diversity strengthens our organisation. We oppose all forms of unlawful and unfair discrimination, harassment, and victimisation. Our commitment extends to ensuring that no individual is disadvantaged due to:

- Age
- Disability (including physical, mental health, and neurodiverse conditions such as autism or ADHD)
- Gender reassignment, gender identity, or expression (including non-binary and gender-fluid individuals)
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin)
- Religion or belief (including cultural observances)
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- **Socioeconomic background** (*recognising barriers related to class or social mobility*)
- **Intersectional identities** (*e.g., compounded discrimination faced by individuals with multiple protected characteristics*)

Legal Compliance

We adhere to:

- Equality Act 2010
- Employment Rights Act 1996
- Human Rights Act 1998
- **Public Sector Equality Duty (where applicable)**
- **WCAG 2.1 standards for digital accessibility**

Scope of the Policy

This policy applies to all individuals working with or for Best Practice Network, irrespective of their role or contractual status. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Senior leaders (Managing Director, Directors, and the Senior Leadership Team)
- Employees, consultants, contractors, and home-workers
- Trainees, apprentices, and partner employers
- Part-time, fixed-term, and voluntary staff

All individuals are expected to familiarise themselves with this policy and comply with its principles.

Policy Status

This document provides guidance and does not form part of any employment contract. Best Practice Network reserves the right to amend this policy as required.

Aim of this policy

Best Practice Network is committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable working environment where all individuals—including Staff, Associates, Learners, Apprentices, and Employers—can thrive, free from discrimination or harassment. Decisions within our organisation are based solely on merit, ensuring fairness and equal opportunity for all.

Non-Discrimination Commitment

Best Practice Network prohibits discrimination, harassment, and victimisation against any individual based on the following **protected characteristics** under the **Equality Act 2010**:

- Sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment
- Marital or civil partnership status
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (including colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin)
- Religion or belief
- Disability
- Age

Legal Compliance

We adhere to all statutory obligations under the **Equality Act 2010** and other relevant legislation. This policy is regularly reviewed to ensure ongoing compliance with current legal requirements.

Scope of Application

The principles of **non-discrimination** and **equal opportunity** extend to all interactions involving:

- Staff, Associates, and former employees
- Learners, Apprentices, and Employers
- Visitors and external partners/suppliers

By upholding these standards, we ensure a respectful and supportive environment for everyone associated with Best Practice Network.

Commitment to and promotion of the policy

Best Practice Network (BPN) is dedicated to upholding the principles outlined in this policy. We ensure that all staff—including employees, freelancers, contractors, and associates—understand its requirements and their obligations under it. Commitment to this policy is formally incorporated into employment contracts and freelance agreements.

To reinforce our commitment to equality and diversity, we provide regular training, updates, and briefings to all staff and associates on best practices.

Additionally, all candidates, trainees, and apprentices enrolled in BPN programmes receive access to this policy via their programme handbooks. It is integrated into the induction process and actively discussed in relevant meetings to ensure awareness and compliance.

Scope and Purpose of this Policy

This policy applies to all **staff, associates, learners, apprentices, and employers** engaged with **Best Practice Network (BPN)**. It reflects our commitment to fostering an inclusive workplace free from discrimination, in compliance with UK equality legislation, including:

- **Equality Act 2010** (protecting individuals from discrimination based on protected characteristics)
- **Employment Rights Act 1996** (ensuring fair treatment in employment)
- **Human Rights Act 1998** (upholding fundamental rights and dignity)

Responsibilities

All individuals covered by this policy must:

- **Comply with UK equality law** and BPN's policies, treating colleagues with dignity and respect.
- **Challenge discrimination or harassment** and report breaches in line with grievance procedures.
- **Lead by example**, ensuring their teams adhere to this policy and promote BPN's equality objectives.

BPN will provide **mandatory equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) training**, including updates on fair recruitment practices under the **Equality Act 2010**. Training will be refreshed annually via online modules.

Policy Application

This policy governs all professional interactions within BPN, including:

- **Recruitment & selection** (job adverts, interviews, hiring)
- **Career development** (training, promotions, pay, and benefits)
- **Workplace conduct** (behaviour, grievances, disciplinary actions)
- **Termination of employment** (exit processes, references)

BPN will make **reasonable adjustments** under the **Equality Act 2010** to accommodate:

- Religious practices
- Cultural observances
- Disability needs
- Domestic responsibilities (e.g., flexible working requests under the **Employment Rights Act 1996**)

Non-Compliance

Breaches of this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, in accordance with the **ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures**.

Questions & Reporting

For queries or to report concerns, contact:

Chris Garcia

Director of Quality & Compliance

chrisgarcia@bestpracticenetwork.co.uk

Forms of Discrimination

At **Best Practice Network**, discrimination—whether by or against staff, associates, learners, apprentices, or employers—is strictly prohibited unless a specific legal exemption applies. Discrimination can be **direct** or **indirect** and may occur intentionally or unintentionally.

1. Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination occurs when someone is treated less favourably because of one or more **protected characteristics** (e.g., age, race, sex, disability).

Example: Rejecting a job applicant due to their gender or ethnicity, suggesting they wouldn't "fit in," is direct discrimination.

2. Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination arises when a seemingly neutral policy, rule, or practice puts individuals with a protected characteristic at a **particular disadvantage**—unless it can be **objectively justified** as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim.

Example: Requiring all staff to work full-time could disadvantage women, who are more likely to have childcare responsibilities. Without justification, this may constitute indirect discrimination.

3. Harassment

Harassment related to any protected characteristic is unlawful. It includes **unwanted conduct** that:

- Violates a person's dignity, or
- Creates an **intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating, or offensive** environment.

4. Victimisation

Victimisation occurs when someone is treated unfairly because they:

- Raised a complaint about discrimination or harassment,

- Supported another person's complaint, or
- Provided evidence in a discrimination case.

5. Intersectionality

"Best Practice Network recognises that discrimination can be compounded when individuals hold multiple protected characteristics. We will proactively address intersectional barriers in recruitment, training, and workplace culture through targeted initiatives and data analysis."

6. Microaggressions & Unconscious Bias

Microaggressions (subtle, often unintentional discriminatory actions or remarks) are prohibited. All staff must complete annual unconscious bias training, and managers will address microaggressions through education or disciplinary action as appropriate.

7. Gender Identity & Non-Binary Inclusion

Gender identity and expression are explicitly protected. This includes use of correct pronouns, gender-neutral facilities, and zero tolerance for misgendering.

Our Commitment

Best Practice Network has a **zero-tolerance approach** to discrimination, harassment, and victimisation. All concerns will be investigated thoroughly and addressed in line with our **Equality and Diversity Policy**.

Recruitment and Selection

Best Practice Network is committed to ensuring that no applicant for a role, programme, or apprenticeship faces discrimination based on any of the protected characteristics outlined above. Our recruitment procedures are regularly reviewed to guarantee that individuals are assessed solely on merit and ability, with unconscious bias minimised through training. Selection criteria are also routinely evaluated to ensure they remain relevant to the position and proportionate.

Advertising & Applications

- Advertisements will avoid language that could deter specific groups from applying.
- A short equal opportunities statement and a copy of this policy will be provided upon request to anyone enquiring about vacancies or courses.

Health & Disability

Applicants will not be asked about health or disability prior to a job offer, except in limited circumstances, such as:

- Determining whether the applicant can perform an intrinsic part of the role (accounting for reasonable adjustments).
- Assessing fitness to attend an interview or identifying reasonable adjustments for the selection process.
- Positive action initiatives to recruit disabled applicants.
- Equal opportunities monitoring (which does not influence hiring decisions).

Protected Characteristics

Questions about pregnancy (past, current, or future), age, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, or gender reassignment will not be asked unless legally justified and relevant to the role.

Right to Work in the UK

Best Practice Network complies with UK immigration law. Assumptions about eligibility will not be made based on appearance or perceived nationality. All prospective staff, associates, or apprentices—regardless of nationality—must provide original documentation (e.g., a passport) before employment commences. A list of acceptable documents is available from SEG People (SEGPeople@supportingeducation.com).

Monitoring & Continuous Improvement

To assess the effectiveness of this policy and address underrepresentation, we anonymously monitor applicants' ethnic background, gender, disability status, sexual orientation, religion, and age. Participation is voluntary and has no bearing on recruitment decisions. This data enables us to identify disparities, tackle discrimination, and promote equality and diversity.

Recruitment of ex-offenders

Best Practice Network is committed to safeguarding children and vulnerable adults. As part of our recruitment process, we use the **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)** to assess candidates' suitability for positions of trust. We fully comply with the **DBS Code of Practice** and treat all applicants fairly.

Fair Consideration of Criminal Records

Having a criminal record does not automatically disqualify a candidate from employment with us. Decisions are based on the **relevance of the offence(s) to the role**, the circumstances involved, and the responsibilities of the position.

Transparency & Confidentiality

- This policy is shared with all candidates at the start of the recruitment process.
- We provide a copy of the **DBS Code of Practice** upon request and ensure candidates undergoing checks are aware of it.
- We encourage applicants invited to interview to disclose any **unprotected criminal records** (as defined by the **Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 2013 & 2020**) early in the process.
- Disclosures should be sent **confidentially** to a designated contact, and access is restricted to only those involved in recruitment.

Assessment & Decision-Making

- We will discuss any disclosed offences with the candidate to assess their relevance to the role.
- Failure to disclose information **material to the position** may result in withdrawal of a job offer.

Best Practice Network is committed to **fairness, equality, and safeguarding** in all recruitment practices.

Training, promotions and conditions of service

Staff training needs will be identified through both informal and formal appraisals. All employees will have appropriate access to training to support their progression within **Best Practice Network**, and promotions will be awarded based on merit.

We will periodically review the composition and progression of staff at all levels to ensure equal opportunities across the organisation. Where necessary, **Best Practice Network** will take action to identify and eliminate any unjustified barriers, as well as provide suitable facilities and conditions of service to accommodate the needs of disadvantaged or underrepresented groups.

Our terms of employment, benefits, and workplace facilities will be reviewed regularly to ensure they are accessible to all eligible staff and that no unlawful obstacles prevent employees from accessing them.

Termination of employment

Redundancy

Best Practice Network will ensure that redundancy criteria and procedures are fair, objective, and free from any form of direct or indirect discrimination, in accordance with the **Equality Act 2010** and the **Employment Rights Act 1996**. Redundancies will be conducted following meaningful consultation, where required, under the **Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992**.

Disciplinary & Performance Management

Best Practice Network will handle absence, capability, and disciplinary matters in a fair, consistent, and non-discriminatory manner, as set out in the **ACAS Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures**. Any formal actions—including warnings, dismissals, or other sanctions—will be applied in line with statutory fairness requirements under the **Employment Rights Act 1996**.

Disability discrimination

At Best Practice Network, we are committed to supporting disabled staff, associates, learners, apprentices, and employers. If an individual has a disability or develops one during their time with us, we encourage them to inform us about their condition so that we can provide appropriate support.

If a disability-related difficulty arises, the individual may contact their line manager or programme director to discuss potential reasonable adjustments. These adjustments should be ones they believe would be necessary or beneficial to their performance. We will carefully consider all such requests and, where reasonable, practicable, and proportionate, we will implement them.

However, there may be instances where a specific adjustment is not feasible. In these cases, we will clearly explain our decision and work with the individual to explore alternative solutions where possible.

Additionally, we regularly assess our premises to identify any physical barriers that might place disabled individuals at a substantial disadvantage. Where reasonably practicable, we will take steps to improve accessibility and ensure an inclusive environment for all.

Mental Health & Neurodiversity

Reasonable adjustments for mental health conditions or neurodiversity may include flexible working hours,

quiet workspaces, or tailored communication methods. Staff are encouraged to disclose needs to their line manager or HR without fear of stigma.

Fixed-term employees and agency/temporary workers

Best Practice Network will monitor its use of fixed-term employees and agency workers, as well as their conditions of service, to ensure they are provided with appropriate access to benefits, training, promotion opportunities, and permanent employment. Where relevant, the organisation will also track their progression to confirm they are being considered for permanent vacancies.

Part-time workers

Best Practice Network is committed to ensuring fair and equitable treatment for part-time employees. We will regularly monitor their conditions of service, career progression, and access to benefits, training, and promotion opportunities to ensure parity with full-time staff. Additionally, all requests to adjust working hours will be handled fairly and in accordance with our Flexible Working Policy.

Complaints of discrimination, victimisation and harassment on the protected characteristics

Best Practice Network treats all complaints of **discrimination, harassment, or victimisation**—related to any of the **protected characteristics**—made by staff, associates, learners, apprentices, employers, students, or third parties with the utmost seriousness. Where appropriate, action will be taken.

Raising a Complaint

Any individual who believes they may have been **unlawfully discriminated against, victimised, or harassed** under this policy should first discuss the matter with their **line manager or Programme Director**. If this is not appropriate, they may contact **SEG People** at:

SEGPeople@supportingeducation.com.

In some cases, concerns may be resolved **informally** to achieve a satisfactory outcome.

Formal Complaints

If an individual wishes to make a **formal complaint**, they should follow **Best Practice Network's Grievance Policy and Procedure**.

Investigation & Confidentiality

Allegations of potential breaches will be:

- Treated **confidentially**,
- Investigated under the **relevant procedure**, and

- The individual concerned will have the opportunity to **respond and provide an explanation**.

Protection & Consequences

- Individuals who raise allegations **in good faith** will not face **victimisation or less favourable treatment**.
- If allegations are found to be **false, malicious, or made in bad faith**, the matter will be addressed under the **disciplinary procedure**.
- Any proven acts of **discrimination or harassment** may result in **disciplinary action**, including potential **summary dismissal** for **gross misconduct**.

Best Practice Network adopts a **zero-tolerance approach** to serious breaches of this policy.