



ISAAC (UK) • UNITED KINGDOM CHAPTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL
SOCIETY FOR AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION

Best Practice Document No. BP13

Equal Opportunities Policy

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1. Policy

Communication Matters is committed to becoming an equal opportunities organisation. It is committed to promoting equal opportunities and preventing discrimination. This Policy applies to both Communication Matters' service delivery and employment practices.

Communication Matters recognises that as we progress towards this goal the Equal Opportunities Policy will require regular review. It is committed to oppose direct and indirect discrimination on the grounds of disability, ethnicity or national origin, colour, race, creed, gender, marital status, domestic arrangements, age, HIV status and sexual orientation. Communication Matters recognises that there are groups who are disadvantaged through discrimination and will work to redress any inequity in its own associate membership, management, service delivery and employment practices.

This Policy recognises and incorporates the implications of legislation relating to equal opportunities and recognises and takes into account Communication Matters' existing policies. Nothing in this policy is intended to prevent Communication Matters from following best professional practice in recruiting the person most suitable for the job.

Communication Matters requires its employees, committee members and associate members to comply with this Policy.

Communication Matters will take positive action as necessary, as a service provider and employer, to uphold this policy.

Communication Matters recognises the need to develop procedures to support the implementation of this policy, for instance through the Best Practice Document on Recruitment, Selection and Appointment of Contractors, and a system of monitoring.

2. Declaration

Communication Matters recognises that communication is fundamental to all people and that inequality caused by communication impairment can be seen as a significant source of discrimination. Broadly speaking, Communication Matters' charitable objectives can be seen in terms of goals designed to redress discrimination against a group of people who have complex communication needs and who may use AAC.

Communication Matters works to facilitate the exchange of information in the field of AAC. Communication Matters is concerned in the support of people who have complex communication needs and who may use AAC, and those others who support them. This Policy clarifies that the charitable objectives apply to all people with complex communication needs irrespective of personal status or circumstances.

This Equal Opportunities policy reinforces the expectation that Communication Matters ensures that the AAC needs of all sections of the community are addressed. In particular, as some disadvantaged groups may have increased incidence of particular problems and yet have reduced opportunity or access to services and information providers, Communication Matters aims to proactively raise awareness of the needs of all people who use AAC.

Communication Matters Trustees accept responsibility for ensuring that equal opportunity consideration permeates the organisation's service delivery and employment practices.

3. Definitions

As a small charity, we will endeavour to act within the spirit of applicable law and to follow best practice guidelines covering equal opportunities over and beyond our legal obligations.

Discrimination

Communication Matters believes that discrimination can take one or more of the different forms set out below:

- Direct Discrimination: This is treating a person or group of people less favourably than other people in the same or similar circumstances. For example, refusing to employ people who meet the requirements for the job because they are black, married with children, deaf, lesbian or over 55, would all constitute direct discrimination.

- Indirect Discrimination: This takes place when a requirement or condition has the effect of discriminating unfairly and unjustifiably between one group or

individual and another group or individual. This can happen quite unintentionally. For example, asking for a degree as an essential requirement for a post, where the possession of a degree may not actually be relevant to the specific needs of the post. Including a requirement to have a degree may merely discriminate against people who have not had the opportunity to gain a degree, without being of any relevance in their ability to meet the needs of the job.

- Discrimination: This also covers actions, both intentional and unintentional, which amount to abuse or harassment of a customer, group of customers, an employee, group of employees as listed in the second paragraph of this policy.

Victimisation

This means treating a person less favourably because they may have asserted their rights under Communication Matters' equal opportunities policy, or have helped somebody else to do so, or because they intend to take or are suspected of having taken such action. However, victimisation provisions do not apply to anyone who has made false allegations.

Harassment

This is unwanted conduct, which is offensive to the recipient and is often discriminatory in nature. It should be noted that the Prevention of Harassment Act 1997 makes harassment a criminal offence.

Positive Action

For disadvantaged groups Positive Action does not mean discrimination against others, but a sustained effort to identify areas of service delivery or employment where those groups are at a disadvantage, and to take whatever steps are necessary to create equal opportunities such as the Leadership Pilot Programme and specific strands at Conference

Reasonable Adjustment

This applies to the steps that are reasonable for an employer to have to take in all circumstances to prevent disadvantage to a person with a disability. The reasonable adjustment refers to any physical feature of premises occupied by the employer or any arrangements made by or on behalf of the employer, which cause a substantial disadvantage to a disabled person compared with non-disabled people.

Disadvantaged Group

This term is used within this document as a collective term for any such people who may be subject to discrimination, victimisation, harassment or inequality of opportunity.

Complex Communication Needs

This term includes congenital and acquired impairments limiting an individual's ability to participate in the exchange of spoken and/or written as well as non-verbal communication.

AAC

Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) is the term used to describe methods of communication which can be used to supplement the more usual methods of speech and writing when these are impaired. AAC includes unaided systems such as signing and gesture, as well as aided techniques ranging from picture charts to the most sophisticated computer technology currently available. AAC can be used as an aid to comprehension as well as providing a means of expression.

People who use AAC

This term includes people who use (or who would potentially) use AAC as well as their family members and primary communication partners.

4. Implementation

Communication Matters is not currently active in all areas of its charitable aims, and even within its current operation, implementation of these Equal Opportunity objectives will follow strategic priorities. This policy will inform the future development of the strategic plan and provide guidance to officers, members and employees engaged in Communication Matters' development.

4.1 Service Provision

All services maintained, developed and co-ordinated by Communication Matters will be designed and provided in such a way as to actively promote the inclusion of people from disadvantaged groups and the facilitation of equal opportunities in AAC outcomes in all sections of the community.

Communication Matters recognises the need for information to be made available and distributed in a variety of media and formats, to accommodate people with differing literacy and visual abilities as well as

those for whom English is not their first, or main, language, we are happy for our literature to be translated into other languages as required.

Communication Matters' publicity, promotional materials and advertising will endeavour to avoid discrimination and stereotypical images and expressions. We will actively screen our literature for such images and expressions.

4.2 Associate Membership

Membership of Communication Matters shall be open to all persons who support or have interest in its aims and objectives. The strategic plan will incorporate such measures as are necessary to identify sources of discrimination and apply positive action where necessary to achieve the Equal Opportunities objectives.

4.3 Management

Communication Matters will endeavour to ensure that the Board of Trustees will fairly reflect the diversity of its membership, and will actively look to broaden representation by minority groups. No member should be discriminated against either in terms of right to stand, vote or be voted for, on the basis of their personal status or circumstances. Consideration will be given to positive action in favour of people who use AAC.

4.4 Employment

Communication Matters seeks to be an equal opportunities employer embracing relevant employment law, current guidance on good practice and Communication Matters' recruitment and selection procedure.

Full and fair consideration is given with regard to employment and opportunities for training and development of employees in accordance with their skills and capacity. The recruitment, selection and appointment of Contractors policy. Should the charity decide in future to employ staff directly then further policies will need to be established.

4.5 Business Practice

Communication Matters will not knowingly purchase goods and services from agencies whose activities are fundamentally contrary to the principles outlined in this policy. Where potential suppliers of goods or services have unsatisfactory practices (but not fundamentally contrary policies) and Communication Matters wishes to enter into contracts this policy

recognises that it may be appropriate to work positively with such a supplier to encourage them to adopt better practice.

5. Monitoring and Review

In order to ensure that these policies are adhered to and adjusted, as changing circumstances require, Communication Matters will regularly monitor the implementation and effectiveness of its equal opportunities policies in line with all other best practice documents and will update and upgrade as necessary.

6. Responsibility

Communication Matters recognises that it is the responsibility of all Members, Trustees and Employees to ensure these policies are adhered to and acted upon. Any discrimination action by a trustee, employee will be addressed and dealt with under the Communication Matters complaints policy contained within the Best Practice Documentation.