**Equal Opportunities Policy & Dignity at Work**

We are committed to creating a positive and inclusive working environment to maximise the potential of all staff, providing equal opportunities in all aspect of employment and avoiding any discrimination at work.

We will not tolerate discrimination (direct or indirect), harassment, bullying or victimisation of employees or any other third parties who work with us or on our behalf.

We will always strive to create an open and honest culture where the differences of others are respected and valued.

We will always be aware of the impact of our behaviour and thinking on people from the protected characteristic groups below (Equality Act 2010):

* Age
* Disability
* Gender / Sex / Gender Reassignment
* Race
* Religious belief
* Sexual orientation
* Pregnancy & maternity
* Marriage & civil partnership

QNIS is committed to providing a working environment which is free from harassment, bullying and intimidation of any nature. Every employee, member of Council, or volunteer of QNIS has a responsibility to treat all colleagues with dignity and respect, regardless of any personal characteristic. Under legislation there are certain characteristics protected from the area of harassment, QNIS will acknowledge these and also extend this protection to all within QNIS. The terms bullying and harassment will be used throughout this policy to mean dignity at work.

Harassment may be unlawful discrimination and serious harassment may be a criminal offence.

**Definitions**

Bullyingis offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behavior, an abuse or misuse of power which is meant to undermine, humiliate or injure the person on the receiving end. Examples of bullying would include picking on someone or setting them up to fail or making threats or comments about someone's job security without good reason.

Harassmentis unwanted conduct related to sex, gender reassignment, race or ethnic or national origins, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or any other protected characteristic which:

* has the purpose of violating a person's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that person; or
* is reasonably considered by that person to have the effect of violating their dignity or of creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for them even if this effect was not intended by the person responsible for the conduct.

Examples of harassment would include: physical conduct ranging from unwelcome touching to serious assault, unwelcome sexual advances, demeaning comments about a person's appearance, unwelcome jokes or comments of a sexual or racial nature or about an individual's age, the use of obscene gestures, even if not directed at any particular person, or displaying offensive or obscene material in the workplace.

Conduct may be harassment whether or not the person behaving in that way intends to offend. Something intended as a "joke" may offend another person. Everyone has the right to decide what behaviour is acceptable to them and to have their feelings respected by others. Behaviour which any reasonable person would find offensive will be harassment without the recipient having to make it clear in advance or at the time that behaviour of that type is not acceptable to them, e.g. sexual touching.

This Dignity at Work Policy aims to:

* Ensure integration of diversity into all aspects of QNIS business
* Ensure that all employees, member of Council or volunteer are treated with respect and dignity from each other, and members of the public
* Ensure that all employees, member of Council or volunteer, respect the differences within the community they serve and treat customers and members of the public accordingly
* Provide a working environment where all backgrounds, cultures, values and lifestyles are respected and treated with dignity at all times.

QNIS will ensure that all new employees, member of Council or volunteers will receive a copy of this policy. The policy will be integrated into all policies and procedures within QNIS.

Copies of this policy will be included in the staff handbook, and will be available to all who request it.

Unacceptable behaviour and practices will not be tolerated. However, if or when a situation arises it will be dealt with immediately, as inaction is not an option. Behaviours found to be breaching this policy will be regarded as misconduct and will be dealt with appropriately and in accordance with the relevant policies, including code of conduct and disciplinary.

**Procedure in Dealing with breaches of Dignity & Respect**

This procedure is complemented by QNIS’sEquality & Diversity and Discipline & Grievance policies.

**Informal stage**

Where possible, breaches of this policy should be dealt with informally in the first instance. In many cases inappropriate behaviours are unintentional and can easily be resolved once the behaviour has been highlighted. This is the most efficient way to maintain positive working relations.

In managing the issue informally, employees should in the first instance alert their line manager to the behaviour, thereafter the employee should be encouraged by the line manager and with their support approach the individual and highlight what behaviour has been offensive. Should the employee be uncomfortable with this then the line manager should approach the individual and have the same discussion. A note should then be put on file of the person who has displayed the inappropriate behaviour and the individual that raised the issue.

**Formal Stage**

If an informal approach does not resolve matters, or you think the situation cannot be dealt with informally, you can make a formal complaint by using QNIS’s grievance procedure. In the case of grievances about bullying or harassment, the normal grievance procedure is modified so that you can choose whether to raise your grievance with your manager or another manager.

The employee must put their concerns in writing and give this to their line manager. The line manager should then arrange a meeting with the employee who has highlighted the concerns. At this meeting the manager should establish what the concerns are, and how the employee would like things resolved. The manager should then conduct any necessary investigations. No investigation should take place prior to there being a meeting with the employee. Once the investigation has been concluded, there could be a variety of outcomes including:

* There is no evidence to uphold the complaint
* There is evidence that may involve action against another member of staff. If action is taken regarding a member of staff other than the person who raised the complaint, the complainant will not be informed of any action taken against other individuals
* If action is required by QNIS because a system or policy has failed, then the CEND will take action to remedy.

You will have the right to be accompanied by a work colleague or trade union representative of your choice at any meetings dealing with your grievance. You will be kept informed of the general progress of the process of investigation and whether the disciplinary procedure is applied as a result. QNIS will treat complaints of bullying and harassment sensitively and maintain confidentiality to the maximum extent possible.

You have a right not to be victimised for making a complaint in good faith, even if the complaint is not upheld. However, making a malicious complaint or one which you know to be untrue may lead to disciplinary action being taken against you.

**Individuals found to be in breach of the principles of this Policy**

Where individuals are found to be in breach of this policy (whether that be employees, a member of Council or volunteer) this will be dealt with in accordance with QNIS’s code of conduct policy and other relevant policies. This may therefore result in termination of the individual’s contract, or engagement within QNIS

**Malicious Allegations**

Any person found to be making fictitious or malicious allegations will be dealt with through QNIS’s disciplinary procedure which may result in dismissal.

**Your responsibilities**

Every employee is required to assist the organisation to meet its commitment to provide equal opportunities in employment and avoid unlawful discrimination.

Employees can be held personally liable as well as, or instead of, the organisation, for any act of unlawful discrimination. Employees who commit serious acts of harassment may be guilty of a criminal offence.

Acts of discrimination, harassment, bullying or victimisation against employees or customers are disciplinary offences and will be dealt with under the organisations disciplinary procedure which may ultimately result in dismissal.

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