



**TITLE OF POLICY:** Equality, diversity and inclusion policy

**Last Review Date:** June 2022

**Current Version:** 6

**Next Review Due:** June 2025

**Policy Author:** Susan White

**Board Approval Date:** June 2022

This policy applies to:

- All offices of Befrienders Highland (BHL)
- Any sessional workers or visiting professionals operating on behalf of BHL
- BHL staff, volunteers, friends, carers and directors

Befrienders Highland is committed to encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion among our workforce, volunteer and friend base, and eliminating unlawful discrimination.

The aim is for our workforce and volunteer base to be truly representative of all sections of society and our friends, and for each employee and volunteer to feel respected and able to give their best.

The charity, in providing befriending services and group activities, is also committed against unlawful discrimination of our friends or the public.

We believe we have much to learn and benefit from diverse cultures and perspectives, and that diversity will make our charity more effective in meeting the needs of all our stakeholders. We are committed to developing and maintaining an organisation in which differing ideas, abilities, backgrounds and needs are fostered and valued, and where those with diverse backgrounds and experiences are able to participate and contribute. We will regularly evaluate and monitor our progress towards diversity.

## **Our policy's purpose**

This policy's purpose is to:

1. Provide equality, fairness and respect for all in our employment, whether temporary, part-time or full-time, in paid or voluntary roles
2. Not unlawfully discriminate because of the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics of
  - age
  - disability
  - gender reassignment
  - marriage or civil partnership
  - pregnancy and maternity
  - race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin)
  - religion or belief
  - sex
  - sexual orientation
3. Oppose and avoid all forms of unlawful discrimination. This includes in:
  - pay and benefits
  - terms and conditions of employment
  - volunteering opportunities
  - referrals for services
  - dealing with grievances and discipline
  - dismissal
  - redundancy
  - leave for parents
  - requests for flexible working
  - selection for employment, volunteering, promotion, training or other developmental opportunities

## **Our commitments**

Befrienders Highland commits to:

1. Encourage equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace as they are good practice and make business sense. Equalities monitoring through voluntary completion of anonymised equal opportunities forms, and analysis of returned forms (see appendix) will enable progress towards this commitment.
2. Creating a working environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, promoting dignity and respect for all, and where individual differences and the contributions of all staff, volunteers and friends are recognised and valued.

This includes ensuring that board directors, line managers, staff and volunteers understand their rights and responsibilities under the equality, diversity and inclusion policy and have access to training. Responsibilities include staff conducting themselves to help the organisation provide equal opportunities in employment, volunteering, access to services, and prevent bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination.

All staff should understand that they, as well as their employer, can be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, volunteers, friends, referrals, suppliers and the public.

3. Take seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, volunteers, friends, suppliers, visitors, the public and any others in the course of the organisation's charitable activities.

Such acts will be dealt with as misconduct under the BHL grievance and/or disciplinary procedures, and appropriate action will be taken. Particularly serious complaints could amount to gross misconduct and lead to dismissal without notice.

Further, sexual harassment may amount to both an employment rights matter and a criminal matter, such as in sexual assault allegations. In addition, harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – which is not limited to circumstances where harassment relates to protected characteristics – is a criminal offence.

4. Make opportunities for training, development and progress available to all staff, who will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential, so their talents and resources can be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the organisation.
5. Make decisions concerning staff based on merit (apart from any necessary and limited exemptions, and exemptions allowed under the Equality Act).
6. Review employment practices and procedures when necessary to ensure fairness, and also update them and the policy to take account of changes in the law.
7. Monitor the make up of the workforce regarding information such as age, sex, ethnic background, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and disability in encouraging equality, diversity and inclusion, and in meeting the aims and commitments set out in this policy.

Monitoring will include anonymous data collection at the point of application, divided into staff/volunteer and friend/carer roles to protect small numbers of applicants, with results presented annually to the Board of Directors. Any issues identified from monitoring will result in an action plan being developed and progress reported to the board.