

TITLE	REFERENCE	VERSION
Equality and Diversity Policy		4

APPROVAL BODY	DATE	REVIEW DATE
Board of Governors	August 2023	August 2024

LEAD PERSON	Director of Operations
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PROCEDURE STATEMENT

Virtual Alliance Ltd Trading as VLUK or UCS are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion which forms an integral element of our culture to create and maintain a trusting, secure and happy environment where everyone can work as equals.

BACKGROUND

All learners and adults within VLUK have a right to be treated with respect and dignity.

PURPOSE

The policy details how VLUK create and maintain a trusting, secure and happy environment where everyone can work as equals. All members of the VLUK community have responsibilities to promote equality of opportunity, experience, and treatment and to challenge stereotypes. Our community consists of a diverse range of people – employees, visitors, learners, and parents. We need to celebrate our differences, by understanding them and enjoying the diversity this brings.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all employees, learners, students, suppliers, and partners of VLUK.

DEFINITIONS

Equality is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents.

It is also the belief that no one should have poorer life chances because of the way they were born, where they come from, what they believe, or whether they have a disability. Equality recognises that historically certain groups of people with protected characteristics such as race, disability, sex and sexual orientation have experienced discrimination.

Diversity is about empowering people by respecting and appreciating what makes them different, in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, sexual orientation, education, and national origin.

Inclusion is an organisational effort and practices in which different groups or individuals having different backgrounds are culturally and socially accepted and welcomed. These differences could be self-evident, such as

national origin, age, race and ethnicity, religion/belief, gender, marital status and socioeconomic status or they could be more inherent, such as educational background, training, sector experience, organisational tenure, even personality, such as introverts and extroverts.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Board of Governors	Overall responsibility for the policies and procedures that govern the work at VLUK and UCS. The Board or a delegated committee will consider our approach to word-processes when reviewing the effectiveness of the internal controls and management of risk.
Chief Executive	Overall responsibility for ensuring VLUK resources are used effectively and appropriately.
Senior Leadership Team	Responsible for the development and delivery and championing of this policy.
Policy Owner	Responsible for ensuring the policy aligns with regulatory requirements and best practice.
All Line Managers	Responsible for ensuring all employees are aware of and follow this policy.
All Employees and Volunteers	To follow policies and procedures, promoting best practice throughout the organisation.

POLICY

AIMS

We foster mutual tolerance and aim for everyone to feel valued within VLUK. By actively promoting equal opportunities and not discriminating either directly or indirectly against anyone on the grounds of colour, race, disability, nationality, beliefs, sexuality, or gender VLUK can ensure that:

- All learners have opportunities to achieve their potential.
- Expectations of all learners are high.
- All learners have access to and can make full use of VLUK's facilities and resources.
- It reflects the community it serves and responds to its needs.
- All learners are prepared for life in a diverse and multi-ethnic society.
- All learners understand the meaning of prejudice, how discrimination occurs and how to take a stand against these.
- It has a positive ethos and environment.
- Racist and discriminatory incidents are dealt with effectively.
- Inclusion issues are taken seriously and are considered in all aspects of VLUK life.
- Diversity is an asset to VLUK.
- Equality of opportunity in learning to enable all learners to access the same materials and support.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

All learners and adults within VLUK have a right to be treated with respect and dignity. This includes a right to:

- Study, learn and work.
- Physical, emotional, and verbal respect, free from violence, bullying, and abusive language.
- Respect for their gender, race, age, and disability.
- Freedom from sexual comments or harassment and inappropriate use of humour.
- The safety of their property.

- Equal opportunities in relation to course access, recruitment, access to extracurricular activities.
- Activities and work experience. Learners, staff and stakeholders within VLUK are encouraged to challenge any inappropriate behaviour or comments. In the case of comments/incidents witnessed by others, silence and non-intervention will be viewed as agreement.

Support is available for learners from their tutor, Head of Campus, Enrichment officer or any member of senior staff.

VLUK will use several different ways to communicate and promote this policy so that all of VLUK's employees, learners and stakeholders:

- Understand our commitment to equality and diversity.
- Understand roles and responsibilities.
- Know where to seek advice and guidance.

VLUK will promote this policy and procedure using various mediums:

- VLUK employees will be introduced to this policy and procedure during their induction session.
- VLUK employee training / briefing meetings will include equality and diversity updates where applicable.
- Understanding will be confirmed at periodic learner progress reviews if required.
- For VLUK employees, this policy and procedure will be promoted as widely as possible using VLUK's internal Google Drive and website.
- Commitment to the policy and procedure will be required from their employees before completion of probation / induction.

VLUK EMPLOYEE TRAINING

VLUK has a duty to promote equality and diversity issues and measures to their employees and ensure that they:

- Recognise their responsibilities and report any concerns about suspected poor practice or possible abuse.
- Follow employee guidelines.
- Undertake online training on equality and diversity to raise awareness of current issues and legislation every two years.

To ensure that this happens:

VLUK understands that there may be a need to link to the Safeguarding & Prevent Policy where appropriate and referrals will be made to the Safeguarding Lead.

- VLUK will provide initial and ongoing training and information to proactively promote equality and diversity awareness and support all their employees to understand their individual responsibilities.
- All new VLUK employees will be trained in equality and diversity and agree commitment to this policy before successful completion of the probationary period is agreed.
- VLUK employees will also receive regular updates via email, meetings, or bulletins to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.
- The VLUK employee induction handbook will also signpost all relevant policies and procedures.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Leaders will ensure that:

- Their own behaviour and those of VLUK employees whom they manage complies in full, with this policy.
- They deal with all allegations of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation sensitively and investigate fairly and thoroughly.
- Any form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation carried out by an individual is treated as a matter for possible disciplinary action.
- The concept of British Values is embedded within the curriculum.
- All learning takes place in a supportive environment free from discrimination or harassment.

- Provide training in equality and diversity to VLUK employees, to give them the opportunity to develop their skills and confidence and to deal with equality and diversity issues in a professional manner.
- Employees and learners are made aware of the equality, diversity and policy as part of their induction programme.
- VLUK recruitment, selection and appointment procedures, performance management processes, employee development opportunities and disciplinary and grievance processes are fairly and consistently applied to all VLUK employees.
- VLUK employees understand they can be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination, in the course of their employment, against fellow VLUK employees, employers, learners and the general public. Where identified all staff are empowered to take appropriate action.

Learners will:

- Avoid saying or doing anything which will hurt others.
- Report all incidents of discrimination.
- Offer support or advice to anyone they see being discriminated against.
- Advise VLUK about ideas that they think will help to prevent discrimination.

All staff will:

- Comply with the requirements of the policy and undertake appropriate diversity and equality training.
- Avoid saying or doing anything which will hurt others.
- Actively demonstrate that they are committed to stopping discrimination in VLUK by modelling positive teaching and learning to learners and ensure that their own interactions are clear and firm without being confrontational.
- Strive to develop an atmosphere of trust and respect where learners feel their concerns are taken seriously.
- Listen seriously to all complaints and concerns about discriminatory behaviour.
- Challenge all discrimination and report it.

In addition, teaching staff will:

- Address discrimination and related issues through their teaching.
- Find ways to engage their learners in meaningful dialogue about equality and discrimination ensuring that all learners are aware of where to go / what to do if they are being discriminated against or see someone who is being discriminated against.
- Promote British Values at all times.
- Follow up all incidents of discrimination involving the learners they have responsibility for.
- Actively encourage collaboration amongst learners in their learning using a range of groupings.
- Support those learners identified as needing additional help to understand their own behaviour and its consequences.

Parents and Carers will:

- Inform VLUK if their child is being discriminated against.
- Support VLUK in its actions against those who discriminate.
- Always contact VLUK if they have a concern about discrimination.

RACIAL EQUALITY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The curriculum of VLUK will, where appropriate, incorporate multi-faith teaching and learning about other cultures. Racist language and behaviour will not be tolerated. All incidents will be recorded, and parents notified. Persistent racism may result in exclusion.

VLUK welcomes and recognises its duties under the Race Relations (amendment) Act 2000 and the Equality Act 2010. We are committed to:

- Promoting equality of opportunity.
- Promoting good relations between members of different racial, cultural and religious groups and communities.

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination.

To achieve these criteria, we are guided by the following principles:

- Every learner should have the opportunity to achieve the highest possible standards and the best possible qualifications for the next stages of their life and education.
- Every learner should be helped to develop a sense of personal and cultural identity that is confident and open to change and that is also receptive and respectful towards other identities.
- Every learner should develop the knowledge, understanding and skills that they need to participate in Britain's multi-ethnic society and in the wider context of an interdependent world.
- Every learner should have the right to be healthy, stay safe, enjoy, and achieve, make a positive contribution, and achieve economic well-being in accordance with Every Child Matters agenda.

VLUK is opposed to all forms of prejudice including racism, sexism, and xenophobia. This includes prejudice, which is directed towards religious groups and particular communities, for example, Islamophobia, travellers, refugees, and asylum-seekers. VLUK hopes through education and knowledge to teach respect, tolerance and understanding towards different beliefs, cultures, and lifestyles. Racist/sexist jokes will be regarded as any other form of bullying and will be dealt with as such.

Religious Observance

We respect the religious beliefs and practices of all staff, learners, and their parents, and will comply with all reasonable requests relating to religious observance and practice in accordance with the absence policy.

The Dress Code

Parents are asked that learners not wear anything which has a slogan, writing or illustration that may be offensive in any way to anyone else. Clothing must be appropriate in terms of decency. Staff reserve the right to ask learners who wear revealing/inadequate clothing to go home and change. Persistent breaches could result in exclusion.

Recruitment of Employees and Learners

Recruitment and selection decisions will support the equality and diversity policy.

- Adopt a consistent, non-discriminatory approach to advertising. Advertisements will avoid stereotyping or using wording that may discourage particular groups from applying.
- Not confine recruitment to areas or sources which provide only, or mainly applicants of a particular group.
- Make certain that all who apply will receive fair treatment and will be considered solely on their ability to complete the programme.
- Use interview questioning that will not be of a discriminatory nature.
- Ensure discussions with learners during the initial assessment and professional discussion will not be of a discriminatory nature.
- Make selection decisions that are not influenced by any perceived prejudices of others.

Education of Learners

The training and assessment of learners will support the equality and diversity policy. To ensure that this happens:

- VLUK will ensure that all learners, regardless of their background, achieve their potential.
- All learners will be given access to opportunities without being influenced by any protected characteristic.
- VLUK will encourage all learners to develop an insight into the lives and experiences of people with different backgrounds of their own.
- The education of learners will be undertaken without discrimination either directly or indirectly.
- VLUK will make a wide range of training and assessment methods available to learners.

- Wherever possible, learners with particular needs will be identified and we will provide the necessary reasonable adjustments to facilitate training and assessment.

COMPLAINTS

Complaints can be made following the VLUK/UCS Complaints Policy procedure.

REFERENCES

Equalities Act 2010
Safeguarding Policy
Grievance Policy
Disciplinary Policy

SIGNATORIES

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Chief Executive Officer
25th Sept 2023