Equal Opportunities Policy

Policy Created: September 2023

Last Reviewed: March 2026

Next Review: March 2027 (or sooner if significant changes in legislation, guidance, or organisational activities occur)

Reviewed by: Laurence Clark

Responsible Officer: CEO

Approved by: CEO

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1. Introduction and Commitment

Pathways Associates CIC is a disabled-led Community Interest Company dedicated to enabling people with learning disabilities, autistic people, and their families to live the lives they choose as equals in their local communities.

The organisation is committed to promoting equality of opportunity, valuing diversity, and fostering inclusion across our workforce, associates, Experts by Experience, and the communities we serve. We aim to eliminate unlawful discrimination and create an environment where everyone feels respected, valued, and empowered to contribute their unique perspectives. This includes actively addressing barriers related to protected characteristics, intersectionality, and systemic inequalities.

As of March 2026, this policy aligns with the Equality Act 2010 (as amended), EHRC guidance on inclusive workplaces (updated 2025), ACAS codes on equality and discrimination, and best practice for small social enterprises from the Charity Commission and CIPD. It emphasises positive action, neurodiversity inclusion, mental health support, and pay equity monitoring. This policy supports our Equality and Diversity Policy (broader inclusion), Safeguarding Adults and Children Policy (protecting from discriminatory harm), Mental Capacity Act Policy (decision-making equity), Corporate Responsibility Policy (ethical practices), and Staff Training Policy (inclusive development).

It reflects our values of being led by lived experience (co-producing equality initiatives with Experts by Experience), partnership (collaborating with diverse stakeholders), inclusion and respect (zero tolerance for discrimination), innovation (creative solutions to barriers), and integrity (transparent monitoring and accountability).

We commit to a workforce and services that truly represent society's diversity, where everyone can thrive without disadvantage.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all aspects of employment and engagement, including recruitment, selection, training, promotion, pay, conditions, and termination. It covers employees, associates, contractors, volunteers, Experts by Experience, and applicants. It addresses all protected characteristics under

the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy/maternity, race, religion/belief, sex, and sexual orientation. It extends to intersectional discrimination and other inequalities (e.g., socio-economic, neurodiversity).

3. Key Objectives

The organisation aims to embed equality in all decisions and practices to attract and retain diverse talent. It seeks to eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation while advancing equality of opportunity. Positive action is used where under-representation exists (e.g., targeted recruitment). Compliance with equality laws is ensured, with monitoring to identify and address disparities. An inclusive culture is fostered through awareness, support, and accountability.

4. Core Principles

Equality is integral to our disabled-led ethos, with proactive steps to remove barriers and promote inclusion. Discrimination in any form is unacceptable and addressed swiftly. Positive action supports underrepresented groups without disadvantaging others. Intersectionality recognises overlapping inequalities (e.g., disability and race). Accessibility ensures practices accommodate diverse needs (e.g., flexible hours for carers). Transparency involves open communication and data monitoring.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

The Board provides strategic oversight and receives annual equality reports. The CEO holds overall accountability for implementation and resources. Line managers promote inclusive practices, handle concerns, and ensure team training. The Equality Lead (integrated with HR role) monitors compliance, advises, and coordinates initiatives. All colleagues, associates, and volunteers uphold the policy, challenge discrimination, and participate in training. Experts by Experience contribute to reviews and co-production.

6. Procedures

6.1 Recruitment and Selection Job adverts and descriptions are inclusive, using neutral language and welcoming diverse applicants. Shortlisting and interviews are based on merit, with reasonable adjustments (e.g.,

accessible formats). Positive action includes targeted outreach to underrepresented groups. Right-to-work and DBS checks follow our DBS and References Policy, avoiding bias.

6.2 Training, Development, and Promotion Opportunities are accessible and equitable, with mandatory equality training for all (annual refresher). Development plans address individual needs, including for disabled staff. Promotions are transparent, based on skills and performance.

6.3 Pay and Conditions Pay is fair and transparent, with annual reviews for equity (considering gender, disability gaps). Flexible working supports balance (links to Home Working Policy). Maternity/paternity/shared parental leave complies with law.

6.4 Monitoring and Positive Action Anonymous data on protected characteristics is collected to monitor representation and identify gaps. Positive action (e.g., mentoring for underrepresented groups) is used lawfully. Annual equality reports inform improvements.

6.5 Harassment and Discrimination Zero tolerance for harassment, bullying, or discrimination. Concerns are handled confidentially via grievance procedures, with support offered. Investigations are impartial; breaches lead to disciplinary action.

6.6 Grievance and Disciplinary Grievances are raised with line managers or HR, investigated promptly per ACAS codes. Use of procedures does not affect tribunal rights (claims within three months). Details are in our Grievance Policy.

7. Training, Awareness, and Support Annual equality training covers unconscious bias, inclusion, and legal duties (accessible formats). Induction includes policy briefing. Awareness campaigns (e.g., workshops co-produced with Experts by Experience) promote culture. Support includes employee assistance programmes and advocacy.

8. Monitoring, Review, and Continuous Improvement Policy reviewed annually or on legislative changes (e.g., EHRC updates). Monitoring via data, audits, and feedback. Learning co-produced with Experts by Experience. Feedback welcomed; annual summaries in CIC report.

9. Conclusion Pathways Associates CIC is dedicated to equal opportunities that empower diverse talent and advance inclusion. By eliminating barriers and promoting fairness, we honour our disabled-led values and create equitable outcomes for all.