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# **Housing Vision**

## **Equal Opportunities Policy**



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**May 2009**

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# Housing Vision

## Equal Opportunities Policy

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# Summary

## General Statement of Aims

HVC values the individual potential and diversity that men and women with different backgrounds, skills and abilities bring to the Company. We are committed to pursuing a policy of equal opportunities in relation to both employment and the services we provide to our clients. This means that we will treat everyone, irrespective of their gender, sexual orientation, age, marital status, race, colour, ethnic or national origin, or disability with dignity and respect, and equally value their contribution, as individuals, to the success of the company.

## Overview

- The Director of HVC is fully committed to a policy of Equal Opportunities for all.
- The production of this document defines the Equal Opportunities Policy of HVC. The policies within this document apply to the Director, employees and Associates of HVC.
- The document explains the rights and responsibilities of all who work for HVC and maps out a path designed to prevent discriminating practices which are unfair, unsocial, unprofessional and de-motivating.
- By meeting the requirements and targets of this policy, HVC aspires to continue to maximise the talents and abilities of all employees of the firm, encouraging the contribution of the individual within the framework of collective and multi-disciplinary collaboration.
- Ensuring that the requirements and targets of this policy are met is the responsibility of every staff member of HVC.
- The collective responsibility for Equal Opportunities is outlined in the remainder of this document which is presented in an easy-to-read questions and answers format.

Dr Richard Turkington  
Director  
Housing Vision Consultancy Ltd  
May 2009

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# Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>CRE</b>	Commission for Racial Equality
<b>DDA</b>	Disability Discrimination Act
<b>EOC</b>	Equal Opportunities Commission
<b>HVC</b>	Housing Vision Consultancy
<b>RRA</b>	Race Relations Act
<b>SDA</b>	Sex Discrimination Act

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## Housing Vision: Equal Opportunities Policy

### 1. WHAT IS OUR EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY?

- We seek to employ the most suitable person for every job, irrespective of sex, age, marital status, disability, sexuality, race, colour, religion or ethnic or national origin and thus to create a staff complement which reflects the diverse community at large.
- All HVC staff must treat each other with dignity and respect and we will provide a working environment free from discrimination, victimization or harassment on the grounds of sex, age, marital status, disability, sexuality, race, colour, religion or ethnic or national origin.
- We will not tolerate acts which breach this policy, and all alleged occurrences of such behaviour will be fully investigated and if necessary be subject to the Company's disciplinary procedures.
- In the event of an employee becoming disabled, we will make every effort, wherever reasonable and practicable, to retain them within the workforce. Furthermore, we will continue to consider flexible working arrangements for any member of staff in circumstances where it is appropriate to do so.
- We will install facilities for people with disabilities in our premises whenever practicable to do so. This would involve making reasonable adjustments to working practices and the physical environment where these factors would place a disabled employee at a substantial disadvantage in comparison with those who are not disabled. Whenever we invest capital in new or refurbished premises, every practical effort will be made to provide for the needs of existing staff, potential new staff and clients with disabilities.
- We will provide professional services to our clients without any form of unlawful discrimination.

### 2. WHY DO WE NEED AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY?

Because it will help us to:

- Demonstrate our commitment as an equal opportunities employer and to review the effects of this commitment on a regular basis.
- Continue to provide the same opportunities for everyone, including advancement and promotion.
- Improve our management practice.
- Strengthen our reputation as a caring employer and thereby encourage staff retention and attract new recruits.

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- Show our customers and clients that we are a fair business organisation.
- Ensure that our employment and business practices are compliant with and therefore do not infringe the law.

### 3. WHAT DOES THE POLICY DO?

The policy is redundant without conscientious application. That is why it is crucial that all employees understand what our responsibilities are and act accordingly.

### 4. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE POLICY?

- We all have a responsibility to ensure that our behaviour at work is not unfairly discriminatory.
- If any member of staff feels that he/she has not been treated in accordance with this policy, there are channels of redress available.
- Please remember that breaching our Equal Opportunities Policy could lead to the firm's disciplinary procedures being invoked and in certain circumstances, you may be personally liable at law for discriminatory actions.

### 5. YOU, EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND THE LAW

#### What are the main laws related to equal opportunities?

- The Sex Discrimination Acts 1975 and 1986 (SDA);
- The Race Relations Act 1976 (RRA); and
- The Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

#### What do they say?

- It is unlawful in employment or in the provision of business and services, to discriminate directly or indirectly on the grounds of sex, marital status, race, colour, ethnic or national origin or disability.
- There is no choice. Everyone must comply with this legislation and ignorance of the law is no defence.

#### Who enforces the laws?

The two main bodies are:

- EOC - Equal Opportunities Commission; and
- CRE - Commission for Racial Equality.

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### **What about people with disabilities?**

Under The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995), disabled employees cannot be treated less favourably than other employees on the grounds of their disability (unless this can be justified). Under DDA 1995, whilst employees are bound to appoint the best person for the job, if a disabled person is the best person, then he/she should be employed provided that adjustments can be reasonably undertaken by the employer.

## **6. WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION?**

Unfair discrimination in employment occurs as a result of prejudice, misconception and stereotyping which hinders the proper consideration of an individual's talents, skills, abilities, potential and experience. It can be direct or indirect, intentional or unintentional.

### **Direct discrimination is:**

- Where a person is, or would be, treated less favourably than another in the same, or not materially different, circumstances.

For example:

- Encouraging only men to study for professional qualifications
- Not promoting an Asian woman to management level because it is thought "she would not fit in".

### **Indirect discrimination is:**

Where a condition or requirement is applied to all people, but which, in practice is such that fewer people in certain groups (by race or sex) are able to comply and it cannot be shown to be justifiable. In other words, some practices may look fair but have *unintended* discriminatory effects.

For example

- Setting an age limit of 32 for a certain management job, which fewer women of that age would be eligible for because of taking a career break to have a family.
- Using word of mouth recruitment as the *sole* method of advertising staff vacancies because it tends to perpetuate the current gender/race employee profile and so exclude certain groups.

## **7. WHAT IS POSITIVE ACTION?**

Positive action allows for training and encouragement so that an under-represented racial group or one sex has an equal opportunity with everybody else. It does not extend to recruitment or promotion on grounds of sex or race.



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NB: Positive action is allowed under both the SDA and the RRA where in the previous 12 months no, or comparatively few, members of one sex, race or ethnic group have been employed in particular jobs.

### **How is this different from positive discrimination?**

Positive action is about training and encouragement and stops there.

If someone from an under-represented group were selected for a job, purely because they were in that group and not otherwise suitable, that would be positive discrimination, which is illegal.

## **8. WHAT IS HARASSMENT?**

Behaviour which is unreciprocated, unwelcome or offensive to the recipient.

What matters is how it feels to the individual. It's no excuse to say "but I only meant it as a joke". Unwanted behaviour is never a joke or harmless fun.

Harassment may take the form of comments, actions, jokes or suggestions, which might create a stressful working environment. It may be intimidating, very unpleasant and often threatening. Such behaviour can be persistent, or it can take the form of an isolated incident towards one, or more individuals. It can be physical contact, verbal or non-verbal (for example, printed material).

Although most cases of harassment are sexual or racial and in some cases people with disabilities are targets it can also happen without any identifiable reason, for example, when someone just takes a personal dislike to an individual, which is equally unacceptable.

### **Sexual harassment is:**

Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, or other conduct of a sexual nature, which result in the individual feeling threatened or compromised.

It is by no means restricted to attempts to initiate sexual relations. It is any harassing conduct based on the *gender* of the recipient.

### **Racial harassment is:**

Derogatory remarks, racially explicit statements, graffiti, jokes, or any other action of a racist nature which is directed at any individual or groups based on ethnic background which results in the individual(s) feeling threatened or compromised.

When someone from an ethnic minority group suffers harassment, it often stems from stereotyped and incorrect assumptions about people who might seem different.

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### 9. WHAT IS VICTIMISATION?

Victimisation is where a person is treated less favourably than another because he/she has brought proceedings, given evidence, or complained about the behaviour of someone who has been harassing or discriminating against them.

### 10. WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT PROBLEMS AT WORK?

All our staff have the right to a working environment free from unfair discrimination, harassment, or victimisation of any kind. If you are the victim of this type of behaviour you should:

- Make it clear to the person concerned that you find their behaviour offensive and ask them not to act in that way. Ask a colleague to be present if you prefer. You should also report the incident to your immediate manager for investigation.

If the situation persists or you feel you are the victim of discrimination from the management level you should:

- Report the incident or situation to the Director.

The most important thing is that you do not ignore the problem nor blame yourself. Keep a diary of all incidents and copies of any written material. Find out if other colleagues are experiencing similar problems and if they are; encourage them to make a complaint too.

Making a complaint is a serious issue and will be treated as such. Be sure of your facts but do not be put off because you do not want to be seen as making a fuss. You have a duty to other colleagues to alert the organisation to problems such as these, so that action can be taken.

If a complaint is made against an individual, a preliminary investigation will be carried out by their immediate Manager in order to resolve the matter immediately or if not, to gather sufficient information to show whether or not there are reasonable grounds to uphold the complaint. The matter will then be dealt with in accordance with the terms of their contract and statutory disciplinary and grievance procedures. i.e. by reference to one of the Directors.

### 11. WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS IF YOU ARE ACCUSED OF HARASSMENT OR VICTIMISATION?

You have the same rights as the person making the complaint as both parties are considered innocent until the outcome of the investigation. On conclusion

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of an investigation, if anybody is found to have made a malicious allegation, he/she will be subject to disciplinary action by the company.

### 12. LIST OF USEFUL CONTACTS OUTSIDE THE FIRM FOR HELP/ADVICE

#### **The Equal and Human Rights Commission**

More London, Riverside  
Tooley Street  
SE1 2RG

Tel: 020 3117 0235

Email: [info@equalityhumanrights.com](mailto:info@equalityhumanrights.com)

Web: [www.equalityhumanrights.com](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com)

#### **Employers' Forum on Disability**

Nutmeg House  
60 Gainsford Street  
London  
SE1 2NY

Tel: 020 7403 3020

Email: [enquiries@efd.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@efd.org.uk)

Web: [www.efd.org.uk](http://www.efd.org.uk)

#### **ACAS (Advisory, Conciliation & Arbitration Service)**

Euston Tower  
286 Euston Road  
London  
NW1 3JJ

Tel: 08457 47 47 47 (helpline)

Web: [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)