

## Positive Action Policy

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## 1 Policy Statement

- 1.1 Oxford City Council is committed to promoting equality, diversity and inclusion within our workforce. This Positive Action Policy outlines our commitment to taking proactive steps to address underrepresentation of groups in our workforce that share a protected characteristic and provide greater diversity in our Council teams
- 1.2 Protected characteristics include:
- Age
  - Disability
  - Gender reassignment
  - Marriage and Civil Partnership
  - Pregnancy and Maternity
  - Race
  - Religion or belief
  - Sex.

## 2 Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all employees and job applicants.

## 3 Positive Action

### What is positive action?

- 3.1 Positive action refers to proportionate measures to help individuals from underrepresented or disadvantaged groups to overcome barriers and gain employment.
- 3.2 This can include targeted training, mentorship, and recruitment strategies aimed at improving diversity and inclusion.

### Why do we take positive action?

- 3.3 We take positive action to create a fairer work environment where everyone has the chance to succeed.
- 3.4 We adopt these approaches to create a more diverse workforce that reflects the community we serve.

### How is it different to positive discrimination?

- 3.5 Positive discrimination involves giving preferential treatment to individuals based solely on their protected characteristics and not considering their skills or abilities, for example by promoting a less qualified candidate over someone more qualified solely to increase representation of a particular group.
- 3.6 Under the Equality Act 2010 it is unlawful to positively discriminate in the workplace.

## 4 How to apply positive action

- 4.1 In line with the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, managers are encouraged to address underrepresentation within their teams or service areas by adopting the following practices.

### Targeted support

#### What is it?

- 4.2 Targeted support refers to the provision of specific training or support to individuals with a particular protected characteristic to help them overcome barriers or disadvantage.

#### How can it be applied?

- 4.3 When identifying training needs for a team, consider any specific training for those from underrepresented groups.
- 4.4 An example would be to offer specialised training and development programmes such as leadership courses specifically for women, people from minority ethnic groups, or employees with disabilities.

### Seeking diverse candidates when recruiting

#### What is it?

- 4.5 This refers to taking proactive steps during the recruitment process to seek out candidates from underrepresented groups.

#### How can it be applied?

- 4.6 It can be applied by partnering with community organisations, attending diversity-focused job fairs, and posting job openings on diverse job boards.
- 4.7 An example of this in practice at the Council can be seen through our Internship and Graduate schemes, where we work with two local universities.
- 4.8 Another example of recruitment action is through the apprenticeship scheme. Hiring managers are encouraged to work with communities and schools where there is a diverse group of potential applicants.

### Bias-free job descriptions

#### What is it?

- 4.9 This is the practice of reviewing job descriptions and job adverts to ensure they use inclusive language, focus on essential skills and qualifications, avoid gendered language and any other requirements that may inadvertently exclude certain groups such as Minority Ethnic groups and other protected characteristics.

#### How can it be applied?

- 4.10 By using our template that follows inclusive language guidelines and removes unnecessary barriers.

- 4.11 As an example of things to consider on a job description, under 'Core Skills and Competencies', managers should avoid inflated requirements that could discourage candidates from a more diverse range of backgrounds. For instance, instead of saying '10+ years of experience required', a more inclusive approach is 'Experience in [identify the specific skills] is needed. Equivalent experience is welcome'.

### Anonymous recruitment

#### What is it?

- 4.12 Anonymous recruitment, also known as blind hiring, is a process that removes personal information from job applications to reduce unconscious bias and ensure fair candidate selection. It focuses only on skills, experience, and qualifications, rather than personal details like name, gender, age, or ethnicity.

#### How can it be applied?

- 4.13 Anonymised recruitment can be applied through the removal of names, gender and age from applications.
- 4.14 Oxford City Council standard procedure removes names, gender and age from applications.

### Diverse interview panel

#### What is it?

- 4.15 A diverse interview panel includes interviewers from different backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. This is proven to reduce unconscious bias, improve candidate experience, and increase workplace diversity.

#### How can it be applied?

- 4.16 When appointing an interview panel, hiring managers should make sure it is diverse and represents a range of protected characteristics.

### Inclusive interview questions

#### What is it?

- 4.17 This involves the use of structured interview questions that focus on skills and experiences relevant to the job.
- 4.18 Inclusive interview questions ensure fairness, diversity, and inclusion by assessing a candidate's skills, experiences, and values without introducing bias. Using inclusive questions creates a welcoming environment and allows all candidates, regardless of background, to showcase their potential. To maintain a fair and consistent recruitment process, all candidates should be asked the same set of questions in the same order. The questions should focus solely on each candidate's relevant experience and skills for the role. Relevant skills and experience might be gained in roles different to the job being recruited to and there will be some elements of the role where training can be provided easily. Questions relating to personal life should be avoided.

#### How can it be applied?

- 4.19 Hiring managers should discuss and agree interview questions with the diverse interview panel, creating questions that are focused on the requirements of the role.
- 4.20 The panel should ensure that all candidates are asked the same questions to provide a fair selection process by assessing each candidate on the same criteria.

#### Tie-break rule

##### What is it?

- 4.21 The 'tie-break' rule allows a hiring manager to favour a candidate with a protected characteristic over another equally qualified candidate, if that characteristic is underrepresented.. This rule can only be applied where the candidates are of equal merit.

##### How can it be applied?

- 4.22 Where two candidates have identical level of qualifications, experience and interview performance, but one candidate has an underrepresented protected characteristic, that individual could be offered the role.
- 4.23 For example, this could be applied in a scenario where the hiring manager has identified that individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds were underrepresented in the workforce and, after a thorough recruitment process, had two final candidates who were equally qualified and performed equally well in interviews.

If one of the candidates was from a minority ethnic background and the other was not, the hiring manager could use the 'tie-break' rule to offer the job to the candidate from an minority ethnic background. This decision would help to address the underrepresentation of minority ethnic groups in the workforce and is lawful under the Equality Act 2010.

## 5 Roles and responsibilities

#### All employees

- 5.1 Council staff are all responsible for:
  - Fostering an inclusive culture by encouraging, valuing and supporting diverse perspectives.
  - Championing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) by actively promoting EDI principles within their teams and across the Council.

#### Leaders

- 5.2 Leaders and managers at the Council are responsible for:
  - Providing strategic direction and oversight to ensure that Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) principles are embedded in all council activities.
  - Embedding inclusive recruitment practices so that they become normal management practices to reduce bias and encourage diverse candidate pools.

- Delivering the outcomes of EDI initiatives and ensuring alignment with the Council's broader strategic objectives.
- Ensuring all staff, particularly those involved in recruitment and leadership, receive appropriate training on EDI

### People Team

5.3 The People Team are responsible for:

- Ensuring that staff are fully informed about the Positive Action Policy and understand its purpose and application.
- Providing ongoing support and guidance to managers and staff on how to effectively apply the Positive Action Policy
- Regularly reviewing workforce and community demographics to identify areas of underrepresentation.
- Setting measurable targets for improving diversity and inclusion.
- Reporting on progress annually and adjusting people strategies as needed.
- Promoting opportunities through staff networks

## 6 Useful resources

6.1 For more support and information please follow these links:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/positive-action-in-the-workplace-guidance-for-employers/positive-action-in-the-workplace>
- Equality and Human Rights Commission [Employment: Statutory Code of Practice](#)
- [Acas](#) the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service
- The [Equality Advisory and Support Service](#) provides free and accessible advice about the Equality Act 2010 to individuals in England, Scotland, and Wales.
- [Equality Act 2010: A quick start guide to positive action in service provision for voluntary and community organisations \(PDF\)](#) ↵

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