

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY

Why equal opportunities is important to SEEDA

SEEDA is committed to the policy of equal treatment of all employees and job applicants and requires all employees to abide by and adhere to this general principle and the requirements of the Codes of Practice issued by the Equal Opportunities Commission and Commission for Racial Equality.

All employees are expected to abide by the requirements of the Race Relations Act 1976, Sex Discrimination Act 1986 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995.

Definition of discrimination

Discrimination will not be tolerated in treating any individual less favourably than others on grounds of sex, colour, marital status, race, nationality or ethnic or national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age or membership of a trade union. Examples of such discrimination include:

- Imposing a requirement on an individual, which is more onerous than that imposed on other individuals; for instance, applying a condition/requirement (which is not needed for the job) which makes it more difficult for individuals of a particular race or sex to comply.
- Making judgements purely on the grounds of sex, race, nationality or ethnic or national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, age or membership of a trade union, which results in the disadvantaging of an employee or job applicant when compared against another. Thus in all areas of grievance, discipline, recruitment, training, appraisal and promotion etc, it is essential that merit, experience, skills and temperament are considered as objectively as possible.

Trade union membership/non-membership

SEEDA recognises the right of an employee to belong to a trade union, and membership of a union will not be taken into account in any way during the career of the employee. Equally, all staff have the right to choose not to belong to a trade union, and they are also fully protected by this Equal Opportunities Policy.

Disabled persons

SEEDA also commits itself to the employment of disabled persons whenever possible, and will treat such employees in all aspects of

their recruitment and employment in exactly the same manner as other employees.

Assistance will be given and, wherever possible, reasonable adjustment will be made to enable disabled employees to gain access to their workplace, to the facilities on company premises, and in progressing their career, subject only to the opportunity existing, the applicant's suitability, talent and wish for it. Appropriate training will be made available to such employees who request it. SEEDA will consider any ideas or suggestions on how its facilities can be made more user-friendly for the benefit of the disabled and where reasonable and practicable will take necessary action to implement such ideas.

Investigating discrimination

SEEDA commits itself to the immediate investigation of any claims of discrimination on the above grounds.

Complaints procedure

In the event that an employee feels that he or she has suffered discrimination in any way, he/she should initially discuss the matter with his/her line manager/supervisor, involving a representative (colleague, Joint Staff Council rep or union representative) if necessary. Every effort will be made to resolve the complaint at this stage and the line manager/supervisor should reply orally to the individual as soon as possible but at the latest within 10 working days.

If the complaint is against the employee's own immediate line manager/supervisor, an individual should discuss the matter with the Head of Personnel Services, who may authorise immediate reference to the next tier of management if this seems appropriate in the circumstances.

In cases of sexual harassment, as far as possible, the anonymity of the complainant will be protected.

If the discrimination continues SEEDA's grievance procedures should be used.

To make a complaint of discrimination, harassment, victimisation, bullying or unfair treatment it will be necessary to have available:

- Details of what occurred, when, and where the occurrence took place
- Any witness statements or names of witnesses

- Names of any others who have been treated in a similar way
- Details of any former complaint made about a similar incident, date, where and to whom made.
- A preference for a solution to the incident.

Until a hearing is arranged, a complainant's name will be kept confidential, other than possibly arranging for details of witnesses to be given to the Head of Personnel Services.

Sanctions

Any employee (no matter what level) found guilty of discrimination will be told to stop immediately and may be dealt with under the disciplinary procedure. The guilty person will also be required to make restitution for the offence; for example, at the very least they will send a written apology to the individual concerned. A perpetrator may be regraded or moved to another team. It should also be noted that an employee who discriminates or harasses may be liable for payment of damages to the person offended. Under the Criminal Justice Act 1994, harassment is a criminal offence punishable by a fine of up to £5,000 and/or a prison term of up to six months.

Unless assurances of future non-discriminatory actions can be made, an employee repeating any act of discrimination may be dismissed for gross misconduct.

Monitoring

To help maintain SEEDA's reputation as an equal opportunities employer, Personnel Services will monitor grievance, discipline, recruitment, training, appraisal and promotion procedures and practices to ensure that individuals are not being discriminated against.