

Religion or Belief Policy

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Preamble to the Policy

Equal Opportunities

The College shall comply with all statutory duties in respect of equal opportunities in the areas of sex, race, age, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or belief, pregnancy, maternity and paternity, marriage and civil partnership and the rehabilitation of offenders. The college shall also comply with the Human Rights Act 1998 and any subsequent enactments or modifications.

Sustainability

The college will comply with all statutory duties in respect of sustainable development by seeking to improve the long-term economic, social and environmental wellbeing of people and communities. This needs to be done in ways which promote social justice, equality of opportunity and which enhance the natural and cultural environment while respecting its limits.

Welsh Language

The Welsh Language Measure of 2011 ensures the equal status of the Welsh language alongside the English language. This law has created the role of a Welsh Language Commissioner and has introduced a number of Welsh Language Standards with which the College are under a statutory duty to comply. This includes conducting Welsh Language Impact Assessments for all new and revised policies.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Policy sets out Coleg y Cymoedd's commitment in complying with the Equality Act 2010 in relation to religion and belief and in creating a fair working and learning environment in which no person is put at a disadvantage because of religion or belief.

2 Our Commitment

- 2.1 Coleg y Cymoedd celebrates and values the diversity brought by its workforce and learner population. The College believes that it benefits from engaging staff and learners from a variety of religious or non-religious backgrounds, and with a range of belief systems.
- 2.2 Coleg y Cymoedd will seek to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of belief systems and also to create a positive environment based on good relations between members of different belief systems.

3 Legal duties

- 3.1 Religion or belief is defined as any religious belief or philosophical belief that has a clear structure or belief system. References to religion or belief also include where an individual has a lack of religion or a lack of belief. The Equality Act 2010 protects against discrimination, harassment and victimisation of people on the grounds of the protected characteristic of religion or belief or philosophical belief, including those with no religion or belief.
- 3.2 Direct discrimination is treating someone less favourably than others because they hold or do not hold a particular religious or philosophical belief. Employees and learners are also protected from direct discrimination which occurs because they associate with someone who holds or does not hold a particular religious or philosophical belief.
- 3.3 Indirect discrimination is when an organisation has practices, policies or procedures which, although they are applied to everyone, have the effect of disadvantaging people of a particular religion or belief (or people without a particular religion or belief).
- 3.4 Harassment is 'unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic, such as religion or belief, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual's dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual'. It may involve nicknames, teasing, name calling or other behaviour which may not be intended to be malicious but nevertheless is distressing. It may be about the individual's religion or belief or it may be about

the religion or belief of those which whom the individual associates. It may not necessarily be targeted at an individual but may consist of a general culture which, for instance, appears to tolerate the telling of religious jokes.

- 3.5 Victimisation is when an individual is treated detrimentally because they have made a complaint or intend to make a complaint about discrimination or harassment or have given evidence or intend to give evidence relating to a complaint about discrimination or harassment.

4 Meeting the legal duties for employees

- 4.1 Coleg y Cymoedd will not discriminate on grounds of religion or belief in the way it recruits and selects staff.
- 4.2 Coleg y Cymoedd will ensure that all employees regardless of their belief systems have equal rights to training, promotion and other aspects of career development.
- 4.3 Coleg y Cymoedd will ensure that there is no discrimination on the grounds of belief systems in relation to dismissal of staff. In particular, should a redundancy occur, it will ensure that religion and belief is not a factor in the selection of those to be made redundant.
- 4.4 Harassment on the grounds of religion or belief will be viewed by the College as a very serious offence, which if proven may in certain circumstances lead to the dismissal of a member of staff, or, if an employee is harassed by a learner, the expulsion of that learner.
- 4.5 Coleg y Cymoedd will ensure that any benefits, facilities and services which it offers to staff will be equally available to all staff, regardless of their belief systems.
- 4.6 Coleg y Cymoedd will ensure that any references provided to staff who are leaving are not influenced in any way by the belief systems of the departing staff member.

5. Meeting the legal duties for learners

- 5.1 Coleg y Cymoedd will not discriminate on grounds of religion or belief in the way it recruits learners.
- 5.2 Coleg y Cymoedd will ensure that all learners regardless of their belief systems have equal rights to all aspects of their development.

- 5.3 Coleg y Cymoedd will ensure that there is no discrimination on the grounds of belief systems in relation to the disciplinary process of learners which may result in exclusion.
- 5.4 Harassment on the grounds of religion or belief will be viewed by the College as a very serious offence, which if proven may in certain circumstances lead to the expulsion of a learner, or, if a learner is harassed by a member of staff, disciplinary action may be taken against that staff member.
- 5.5 Coleg y Cymoedd will ensure that any facilities or services which it offers to learners will be equally available to all learners, regardless of their belief systems.

6 Ensuring equality

- 6.1 Coleg y Cymoedd values all its staff and learners equally, and will endeavour to create an environment in which all staff and learners, whatever their belief systems, feel equally valued and welcome, and where behaviour which discriminates against those of a particular belief system is not tolerated. This policy is based on the principle that all staff and learners have a right to their own belief system, but no right to enforce it on others.
- 6.2 Coleg y Cymoedd aims to eliminate discrimination on the grounds of belief systems in its structures and practices as well as to encourage change in individual behaviour, and ensure equality of opportunity and treatment for all staff and learners regardless of their belief systems.
- 6.3 The College environment, in terms of its pictures, images, publicity materials, literature etc. will aim to reflect the diversity of its staff and learners, including diverse religious and cultural backgrounds.
- 6.4 Abuse, harassment or bullying on the grounds of belief systems (e.g. name-calling, derogatory jokes, unacceptable or unwanted behaviour and intrusive questions) are serious disciplinary offences, and will be dealt with under the appropriate College procedure.
- 6.5 Propaganda directed against any particular belief systems in the form of written materials, graffiti, music or speeches will not be tolerated. Coleg y Cymoedd will remove any such propaganda whenever it appears on the premises.
- 6.6 Coleg y Cymoedd recognises that the right to freedom of thought is absolute, but the right to manifest beliefs is qualified by the need to protect the rights and freedoms of others. Any attempt at coercing others to comply with a particular belief system, for example through distribution of literature, threats or offensive remarks will result in disciplinary action. Coleg y Cymoedd will take the view that

atheists and agnostics have as much right to protection and respect for their beliefs as do adherents of religions.

- 6.7 Issues of belief systems will be included in all equality training.
- 6.8 Coleg y Cymoedd will aim to provide space, if available, for staff and learners who wish to meet to share religious experience during break times as long as no attempt is made to convert others at work, or to pressure other staff and learners to join in
- 6.9 Coleg y Cymoedd will be mindful of cultural and religious norms when considering the use of a dress code. The wearing of items arising from particular cultural/religious norms (e.g. hijab, kippah and mangal sutra) is seen as part of a welcome diversity of styles and cultures within the College; however they need to satisfy health and safety requirements.
- 6.10 Requests for time away from work or study will be reasonably considered and will take into account the needs of the College.
- 6.11 Coleg y Cymoedd will treat sympathetically requests for extended time away for religious purposes, such as pilgrimages, births, weddings, deaths in another country etc. Such requests will be granted if reasonable and practicable and in line with the needs of the business.

7 Facilities

- 7.1 Coleg y Cymoedd will aim to provide, if possible, a quiet space for prayer/contemplation, with suitable washing facilities nearby, for the use of staff and learners.
- 7.2 Coleg y Cymoedd will, where possible, assess the demand from staff and learners for food that meets religious dietary requirements e.g. vegetarian, kosher, halal by monitoring staff and learners on this issue at the start of each academic year.

8 Division of responsibilities

- 8.1 Governors should be mindful that the membership of the Corporation reflects the diversity of the communities served by the College.

Governors are responsible for ensuring that:

- The College's strategic equality plan includes a commitment to religion or belief equality;

- Equalities training features as part of the College's strategic equality plan;
- They are aware of the Corporation's statutory responsibilities in relation to religion or belief legislation as an employer.

8.2 The Principal/Chief Executive and Senior Leadership Team are responsible for:

- taking the lead in creating a positive, inclusive ethos that challenges inappropriate or discriminatory behaviour in relation to religion or belief on the part of managers, staff or learners;

8.3 Directors/Managers are responsible for ensuring that:

- they are aware of the College's statutory duties in relation to religion or belief;
- all aspects of College policy and activity are sensitive to issues of religion or belief;
- the procedures for the recruitment of staff and learners, and the promotion of staff, enshrine best practice in equal opportunities;
- the College's publicity materials present appropriate positive and non-stereotypical messages about people from diverse religions and with a diverse range of beliefs;
- appropriate training and development is provided to support the appreciation and understanding of diversity in relation to religion or belief.

8.3 Staff are responsible for ensuring that:

- they are aware of the College's statutory duties in relation to religion or belief legislation;
- they may challenge or report inappropriate behaviour by learners, work placement providers, outside contractors or other members of staff;
- the College, and each of its individual staff whenever practicable, challenge or report discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief whether intentional or unintentional, whenever it occurs.

9 Monitoring

9.1 The College is committed to ensuring that it is making progress in achieving equal opportunities for employees and learners regardless of their belief system. To ensure that progress is made, it may undertake monitoring of aspects relating to belief systems.

- 9.2 The Equality and Diversity Committee will produce an annual equality and diversity report including quantitative and qualitative data together with recommendations for improvement. This report will be evaluated by the Senior Leadership Team and the Corporation Board and will be published accordingly.

10 Review and consultation

- 10.1 The policy will be made available to all employees and learners.
- 10.2 This Policy will be reviewed on a regular basis in accordance with legislative developments and within the guidelines of good practice in the College.
- 10.3 As part of the review the College will seek and take into account the views of stakeholders including learners, work placement providers, the local consultation/negotiating arrangements within the College, and appropriate equality bodies.

11 Complaints

Staff or learners who feel they are being discriminated against on grounds of their religion or belief by other members of staff or learners should raise the matter under the Bullying and Harassment Policy or Grievance/Complaints Procedure, which will, if the accusation is upheld, be treated as a serious disciplinary offence.

12 Links to other policies:

This policy should not be read in isolation, but cross-referenced with all relevant College policies and other policies agreed by the corporation. These may include:

- Equality and diversity policy
- Bullying and harassment policy
- Recruitment and selection policy
- Grievance policy and procedure
- Disciplinary policy and procedure