



Voice Study Centre

Policy Statement on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Voice Study Centre fosters good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not, celebrates diversity, challenges inequality and is committed to nurturing an inclusive and diverse community that is open to all who have the potential to benefit from membership of it, and which ensures equality of opportunity for all its members. We expect all our employees, workers, contractors, students, invitees and visitors to be treated, and to treat others, with dignity and respect. We have a zero-tolerance approach to discrimination, harassment and bullying. Zero tolerance means that (i) we will take action and (ii) the action will be proportionate to the circumstances of the case.

We are committed to meeting our obligations under the Equality Act 2010, which requires the Voice Study Centre to show no discrimination as required by law on account of age, disability, gender reassignment*, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. The Voice Study Centre will always act lawfully and this may include taking action to support people with particular protected characteristics, including disability and sex. In addition to its obligations under the EA, the Voice Study Centre shall adopt policies, practices, and procedures that define expected standards of behaviour and specify any additional characteristics, beyond those required by law, to which protection is provided, for example, in relation to political belief, social background and refugee status.

The Voice Study Centre's policies, practices and procedures specifically extend to all gender identities including trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming people.

For the purposes of this Policy Statement the term 'trans' is an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. The term 'non-binary' is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity does not sit comfortably with 'woman' or 'man'. Non-binary identities are varied and can include people who identify with some aspects of binary identities, while others reject them entirely.

Aim

This policy document describes our approach, in the context of our institutional mission, values and objectives as set out in our Strategic Plan, our People Supporting Strategy, our Education and Research Strategies and equalities legislation.

It supports our commitment to addressing under-representation where it exists, celebrating the diversity of our students and staff, nurturing communities of belonging in which all are accepted without exception, and promoting inclusion, well-being, resilience and empowerment to enable everyone to reach their full potential. It underpins our determination to confront and eradicate

violence, harassment and assault in all its forms, including misogyny, harassment and violence against women, racially, religiously or culturally motivated assaults or violence experienced by individuals or groups related to other personal or protected characteristics.

The Voice Study Centre expects all communities, employees, workers, contractors, students, invitees and visitors to be treated, and to treat others, with dignity and respect. It applies to all employees, workers, contractors, students, invitees and visitors and is a means to ensure that every member of our community is aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Managing Director is responsible for ensuring the University complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. We will produce an annual Equality, Diversity and Inclusion report which includes information that demonstrates how we are meeting our legislative obligations and the progress we are making towards achieving our Equality Objectives.

The Director of Operations, supported by the senior management team is responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented effectively.

Every member of our community has a responsibility to abide by this policy, to challenge inappropriate behaviour if they feel able to do so, in an appropriate way, and to report any behaviour that contravenes this policy.

Our Legal Obligations

Under the General Equality Duty set out in the Equality Act 2010 (the Act) the Voice Study Centre has obligations as both an employer and as an education provider. This means that we must, in the exercise of our functions, have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

In addition, as an alternative education provider we must:

- Publish information to demonstrate our compliance with the General Equality Duty across our functions;
- Prepare and publish equality objectives.

The Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) protects people from discrimination related to 'protected characteristics'. The protected characteristics included in the Act are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race (includes colour, nationality, ethnic or national origins)

- Religion or belief (includes lack of religion or belief)
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

As set out in our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Statement, Voice Study Centre policies, practices, and procedures specifically extend to cover other characteristics and encompass all gender identities including trans, non-binary and gender non-conforming.

Our Person-Centred Approach

We place people at the centre of processes and systems and expect judgement and decision-making to be based on the principles of dignity and respect and our institutional values. To ensure staff are aware of what is expected from them, and what they should expect from others, we have adopted the *How We Work at Essex* framework.

How We Work at Essex contains a set of values-based expectations that will be embedded through a comprehensive change project, covering our policies and guidance and our leadership and development programmes, and reinforced by our physical space and ways of working.

How We Work at Essex supports our strategic objectives in three priority areas: People, Knowledge, and Communities.

People: We will support an inclusive working environment which recognises and harnesses the contribution of every member of the Voice Study Centre through inclusive policies and processes that put people at the centre and also by our behaviours, which will promote an environment where people learn from others and are supported through effective processes and partnership to take decisions on behalf of the organization.

Knowledge: We will support staff and students to co-produce relevant, responsive and inclusive curricula that offer a diverse range of learning opportunities and that are agile, responsive to current issues/emerging challenges and designed to meet the needs, interests, learning styles, aspirations and backgrounds of our student community.

Communities: We will create living and learning communities that foster students and staff to feel a sense of belonging, inclusion, well-being, resilience and empowerment.

Our Zero Tolerance Approach to Harassment and Bullying

Our Harassment and Bullying: Our Zero Tolerance Approach - Information for employees, workers, contractors, students, invitees and visitors document explains how the University deals with reports of harassment, bullying, hate incidents or assault.

Reports of Harassment, Bullying, Sexual Violence or Hate Incidents

We will support those who experience harassment, bullying, sexual violence or a hate incident and take action to ensure the behaviour stops where possible. Any employee, worker, contractor, student, invitee or visitor to any of our campuses who experiences or observes any inappropriate behaviour is encouraged to report it through our **Report and Support** system that is located on the Voice Study Centre website. This can be done anonymously, or reportees can ask to be contacted by

an adviser. While students are able to contact the Head of Student Support, we will signpost the anonymous reporting system via our Canvas VLE.

Where an informal approach to dealing with harassment or bullying has not been successful or where the matter is sufficiently serious that informal approaches are not appropriate, employees, workers, contractors, students, invitees or visitors can use our Complaints of Harassment or Bullying procedure to make a complaint. Complaints by students about other students are dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct; complaints by students about employees or workers should be made through the Student Concerns and Complaints Procedure.

Inclusion and Academic Freedom

The Voice Study Centre values academic freedom, freedom of expression and inclusion. Academic Freedom is an essential part of academic and community life and flourishes where there is tolerance of, and respect for, a wide range of views and beliefs. In addition, everyone has the right to freedom of expression within the law.

Our legal obligations and our commitment to inclusion demand that we exercise our freedoms responsibly, respectfully and with due regard to the values we share as a community. This means that neither academic freedom nor freedom of expression can be used as an excuse for subjecting an individual or group to bullying or harassment or for committing a hate incident. Our Policy on **Academic Freedom and Freedom of Speech** affirms our commitment to promoting academic freedom, freedom of speech and inclusion within the law and our founding charter also enshrines academic freedom within the law.