



# Adult Education Services Co Cavan VEC

## Equal Status Policy (DRAFT) 2009

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## **County Cavan V.E.C. Adult Education Services<sup>1</sup>**

This document was developed by County Cavan V.E.C. Adult Education Services and Eoin Morrow using a partnership approach including: focus group, best practice, guidelines for Equal Status Policies in Enterprise, the Employment Equality Act, 1998, The Equal Status Act, 2000, The Equality Act, 2004 and The Code of Practice on Sexual Harassment and Harassment at Work.

The following individuals attended the focus group and participated in the development of this document:

### Co. Cavan V.E.C. Adult Education Services:

Fiona Maloney – Adult Education Officer.  
Finola Keogh – Development Worker  
Kevin Farrelly – Resource Person  
Bernie Sexton – Resource Person  
Sean Corcoran – Youthreach Co-ordinator  
Mary McKenna – Resource Person  
Marie Reilly - Tutor  
Regina Lynch – Adult Literacy Organiser  
Rory Moore – Administration Officer  
Charlotte Dunne - Tutor  
Maureen McIntyre – Youth Officer

The consultant does not provide legal advice. Any questions of a legal nature should be referred to a solicitor or the Equality Tribunal.

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<sup>1</sup> When Co. Cavan VEC is referred to in this document, it is taken to refer to the following services within the Adult Education Services: Community Education, Adult Education, AEGIS, Adult Literacy, Youthreach, Youth Services.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

Adult Education Services as part of Co. Cavan VEC adheres to the mission statement of County Cavan VEC which is as follows:

“County Cavan Vocational Education Committee is an educational authority providing a comprehensive range of full-time and part-time educational, training and support services. It aims to provide education for life in an innovative, responsive, caring and flexible learning environment. It is committed to providing the maximum access to persons of all ages and backgrounds and to achieving quality and excellence in all aspects of its work. It achieves this through its own schools, Cavan Institute, Learning Centres and, in conjunction with other providers of education and training in the county, to meet the changing technological, economic, social and cultural needs of the community.”



## **Vision of County Cavan VEC**

“The development of an education system that fosters life long learning in all VEC centres of education and training in a systematic approach that is inclusive, respects cultural diversity and implements legislative requirements.”



## **Equality Statement**

County Cavan Vocational Education Committee is an equal opportunities employer. We recognise that in our society certain groups and individuals are discriminated against and denied equality of opportunity. The Committee aims to create an environment in which equal opportunity is promoted to allow the development of the full potential of each person involved in our organisation and to ensure that no person is treated less favourably on any of the nine legally protected grounds.

As part of our commitment to equality of opportunity, we are committed to promoting an environment free of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment, victimisation or bullying<sup>2</sup>. It is recognised that harassment and bullying can seriously damage working and social conditions and it will not be tolerated at any time in Co. Cavan V.E.C. The Committee and staff of Co. Cavan V.E.C. will investigate through its different management structures reports of any statement or behaviour which may be interpreted as discriminatory, reinforcing

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act for legislation on Bullying

stereotypes or is in any way derogatory to an individual. We respect, value and accommodate diversity across all nine grounds in the equality legislation.

Co. Cavan V.E.C. adheres to the Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Equality Act, 2004. To ensure that the policy is effective and that no service user<sup>3</sup> or employee receives less favourable treatment, the organisation will promote equality of opportunity and prohibit discrimination across 9 grounds, as per the Acts:<sup>4</sup>

- Gender
- Marital Status
- Family Status
- Sexual Orientation
- Religion
- Age
- Disability
- Race
- Membership of the Traveller Community

Co. Cavan VEC does not limit protection to just these nine grounds.

#### **The Equal Status Acts, 2000 to 2004:**

- Promote equality of opportunity,
- Prohibit discrimination subject to exemptions on nine specified grounds,
- Prohibit sexual harassment, harassment and victimisation,
- Require the reasonable accommodation of people with disabilities and allow for a broad range of positive action measures.

#### **The Equal Status Acts, 2000 to 2004, apply to people who:**

- Buy and sell a wide variety of goods,
- Use or provide a wide range of services,
- Obtain or dispose of accommodation,
- Attend at or are in charge of educational establishments.

The principle features of the legislation are set out in the Equality Authority publication: The Equal Status Acts 2000 to 2004 and this policy should be read in conjunction with this publication. Further information on the Equal Status Acts, 2000 to 2004, can be obtained from the Equality Authority's information service.

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<sup>3</sup> When 'service user' appears in this document, it is taken to include: learners, participants, trainees, clients and customers (external and internal).

<sup>4</sup> Equal Status Act 2000 to 2004

Lo-call: 1890 245545, Tel: 01 4173333 or Web site [www.equality.ie](http://www.equality.ie)

The Equal Status Acts, 2000 to 2004, apply to Co. Cavan V.E.C. where it provides a wide range of services to the public, including educational/learning services and support.

## **1. Commitment**

- 1.1 Co. Cavan V.E.C. endeavours to provide an excellent service to all our service users.
- 1.2 We seek to equip all our staff with the skills and knowledge needed to deal confidently with equality issues and to be professional in our working relationships with service users.
- 1.3 We desire to have a well motivated workforce which takes pride in our work.
- 1.4 This Equal Status Policy sets out our commitment to meet our obligations under the Equal Status Act, 2000 and the Equality Act, 2004, to proactively promote equality and to work to prevent discrimination.

In this we seek to ensure:

- That the service we provide is free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and victimisation;
- That all service users, contractors and employees are treated with respect and dignity;
- That the service we provide is accessible and relevant;
- That the service accommodates diversity and seeks to meet needs specific to particular groups of service users;
- That the service seeks to benefit all service users by promoting equality and implementing positive action;
- That discrimination, sexual harassment or harassment of or by the staff employed in Co. Cavan V.E.C. and non-employees, such as service users and business contacts, will not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action<sup>5</sup> (in the case of employees) and other sanctions, for example the suspension of contracts or services or exclusion from premises (in the case of non-employees);
- Complaints will be treated with fairness and sensitivity and in as confidential a manner as possible. This policy should be read and operated in conjunction with Co. Cavan V.E.C.'s policies on health and

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<sup>5</sup> See Cavan VEC's disciplinary procedures

- safety, sexual harassment, harassment, bullying and employment equality; policies are made available in the Resource room and in the AEO's office;
- Co. Cavan V.E.C. has adopted and implemented this policy after consultation about its content with staff and service users.



## **2. Publications and Materials**

- 2.1 Co. Cavan V.E.C. strives to provide all their materials in a relevant and accessible manner to people from across the nine grounds.
- 2.2 We strive to provide materials in alternative formats.



## **3. Reasonable Accommodation**

- 3.1 Co. Cavan V.E.C. has an obligation to reasonably accommodate service users with disabilities by providing special treatment or facilities so that it is not impossible or unduly difficult for the service user to avail of the organisation's service.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.2 Staff will explore necessary adjustments with service users who have disabilities to access any necessary advice or support and we will strive to secure implementation of such adjustments.
- 3.3 We will identify contact points to ensure that we have ongoing access to the knowledge required to make reasonable accommodation for people with disabilities.
- 3.4 Co. Cavan V.E.C. ensures that the physical environment is accessible and seeks to avoid barriers such as narrow doorways, steep staircases, cluttered layout, poor lighting and signage.
- 3.5 Co. Cavan V.E.C. ensures that staff do not use inappropriate or disrespectful language.

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<sup>6</sup> However; they are not obliged to provide special facilities or treatment when this costs more than what is called a nominal cost. What amounts to nominal costs will depend on the circumstances such as the size and resources of the organisation involved. The Equality Act, 2004.

- 3.6 Co. Cavan V.E.C. ensures that staff do not display patronizing attitudes and make assumptions about people's abilities or inabilities.
- 3.7 Each person has unique needs and must be considered, assessed and accommodated individually. On occasions it may be appropriate to ask service users to identify whether they have any particular requirements.
- 3.8 Co. Cavan V.E.C. provides an environment where a person with a disability can identify what their needs are and how these might best be met through dialogue with staff.
- 3.9 The AEO has the responsibility to ensure that service users with disabilities are reasonably accommodated.



#### **4. Promoting Diversity**

- 4.1 Co. Cavan V.E.C. endeavours to address the specific needs of our service users from all the grounds covered by this policy in order to enable them to avail of our services.
- 4.2 We endeavour to ensure a physical environment that is welcoming to all, taking initiatives such as using art and posters on walls to reflect this commitment.
- 4.3 We encourage staff and service users to attend equality related training and events.



#### **5. Service User Relations**

- 5.1 We provide our services in a considerate, courteous and open manner and are straightforward, consistent and professional.
- 5.2 We are committed to providing an environment that is free from any form of discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment or victimisation.
- 5.3 We seek to treat all service users fairly and not to discriminate, while respecting individual differences and needs.
- 5.4 We are committed to creating an environment in which all service users

are treated with dignity and respect.

- 5.5 Service users will not be penalised or treated less favourably because of pursuing rights by way of taking action, supporting action or giving notice of intention to take / support action under equality legislation.

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## **6. Service User Feedback**

- 6.1 We encourage the participation of our service users to provide feedback in relation to this policy.
- 6.2 We continue to provide proactive service user feedback mechanisms which may include the use of evaluations, comment cards, suggestion boxes, questionnaires or dialogue.

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## **7. Communications Strategy**

- 7.1 We endeavour to ensure that people across the nine grounds are aware of our service through various forms of communication including; Web site, publications, leaflets and flyers.
- 7.2 We have joined networks and mailing lists on equality issues to bring equality news into the organisation.

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## **8. Outcomes**

- 8.1 We seek positive experiences and outcomes for all service users across the nine grounds. Outcomes include access, participation, personal development and achieving education credentials.
- 8.2 This is reflected in our commitment to equality and the way in which we prioritize our work, use positive action measures targeting specific groups and invest in the promotion of diversity.





## **9. Advertising**

- 9.1 We will keep all advertising under review to ensure that it complies with the Equal Status Acts, 2000 to 2004, that it includes a positive reflection of diversity and that it promotes equality.
- 9.2 It is our policy to avoid displaying, intentionally or unintentionally, advertisements or wordings that discriminate or unnecessarily exclude individuals or groups from any of the grounds covered by this policy.



## **10. Policy Responsibility**

- 10.1 The Adult Education Board, Youthreach Board of Management, Youth Sub-Committee and the AEO are responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Equal Status Policy.
- 10.2 The AEO and Equality Working Group are responsible for overseeing the implementation of and monitoring the effectiveness of the Equal Status Policy within the organisation in order to:
- Assess whether the aims of the Equal Status Policy are being achieved.
  - Measure the effect of action taken to promote and support that policy.
  - Highlight areas where further action is required.
  - Provide relevant and up to date information to staff and volunteers on equality issues.
- 10.3 Management and staff have a particular responsibility to ensure that discrimination against Co. Cavan V.E.C.'s service users does not occur and that equality is promoted.

Management and staff should:

- Provide good example by treating service users with courtesy and respect;
- Promote awareness of the equality policies and procedures;
- Be vigilant for signs of discrimination and take action before it escalates;
- Respond sensitively to a service user who makes a complaint of discrimination;
- Explain the procedures to be followed if a complaint of discrimination is made;

- Ensure that a service user making a complaint is not victimised for doing so; and
- Monitor and follow up the situation after a complaint is made so that discrimination does not recur.

10.4 All staff employed by Co. Cavan V.E.C. and service users can contribute to achieving an environment free from all forms of discrimination and to promoting equality through compliance with policies and procedures. Discrimination<sup>7</sup>, sexual harassment, harassment, victimization and bullying of or by staff or service users will not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action.

## **11. Policy Communication**

- 11.1 Co. Cavan V.E.C. is committed to the effective communication of this policy.
- 11.2 All Co. Cavan V.E.C. staff will be made aware of the policy at staff meetings and through the ongoing work of management and the AEO.
- 11.3 New Co. Cavan V.E.C. staff will be made aware of the policy as part of the formal induction process.
- 11.4 A summary of the Policy will be prominently displayed in the reception area, resource room, meeting and activity rooms.
- 11.5 Discrimination against service users or staff by contract service providers will not be tolerated and may lead to termination of contracts, or suspension of services, or exclusion from the premises or the imposition of other sanctions (as appropriate).
- 11.6 We aim to provide training to staff on equality issues related to the nine grounds covered by the equality legislation, on the prevention of discrimination, bullying, harassment, sexual harassment or victimization.
- 11.7 We aim to provide training on effective strategies in accommodating diversity and promoting equality.
- 11.8 Information in relation to this policy will be provided to service users.

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<sup>7</sup> See Co. Cavan VEC's Codes of Practice for dealing with Complaints of Sexual Harassment, Bullying and Harassment in VEC Workplaces.



## **12. Monitoring**

- 12.1 Co. Cavan V.E.C. will develop practices and procedures on foot of this policy; The AEO and Equality Working Group will monitor and report on their impact.
- 12.2 We will undertake, on our own initiative, an annual equality review in our organisation and will prepare an equality action plan.
- 12.3 The development of an equality review will include the collection and recording of information. Co. Cavan V.E.C. complies with the Data Protection Act, 1988.



## **13 Complaints**

- 13.1 We endeavour to provide an excellent service to all our service users. While doing this, we also maintain an accessible, easy-to-use system for dealing with any complaints about the service we provide<sup>8</sup>.
- 13.2 We ensure that service users with a complaint initially have access to the local management to seek resolution of the difficulty, if possible. The local management will also inform the service user of the time limits under the Act.
- 14.3 The AEO acts as the contact for service users dissatisfied with the local management's response to a complaint.



## **15. Review**

- 15.1 We are committed to:
- Keeping this policy under review;
  - Monitoring outcomes across the grounds; and
  - Reporting in our Annual Report on its implementation and on any positive action taken

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<sup>8</sup> See Co. Cavan VEC's Customer Service Policy.