Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy

Scope

This policy applies to **Smart Energy Training T/A Smart Gas Training & Assessment Centre Ltd, Part of the Realise Training Group (Realise)** and all of its subsidiary companies. It sets out the standards and expectations that apply across the Group and is relevant to all employees, contractors, and officers. This policy does not form part of any individual's contract of employment or terms and conditions, and the company may amend it from time to time.

This Policy is designed to establish clear, actionable guidelines for everyone connected with the Company: our employees, delivery partners, learners, customers, contractors, and visitors.

We are dedicated to ensuring that:

- Our leaders exemplify equality of opportunity and diversity, cultivating an ethos
- and culture that proactively prevents all forms of direct or indirect
- discriminatory behaviour. Prejudiced behaviour is never tolerated by leaders,
- employees, customers, or learners.
- We consistently uphold an open-access culture, actively focusing on
- strategies to increase the recruitment and participation of learners, clients, and
- employees from under-represented groups.
- Our learning programmes are diverse and inclusive, utilising a wide range of
- teaching, learning methods, and resources to promote inclusivity and
- sensitivity to all equality and diversity issues.
- All learners and customers, regardless of background, have equitable access
- to appropriate support and facilities.
- Our applicant pools for employment are wide and diverse, with positive action
- measures implemented to encourage applications from under-represented
- groups.
- Employee recruitment and promotion procedures are rigorously designed to
- eliminate discrimination.
- The perspectives and feedback of learners, employees, and customers are actively sought, valued, and used to continuously improve practices across the Company.

Introduction

The Company are deeply committed to fostering a truly inclusive, diverse, and equitable environment for our employees, learners, customers, and partners. This policy serves as our unequivocal public commitment to promoting equality, actively aligning with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and the Equality Act 2010. We are dedicated to achieving the three core aims of the PSED:

- Eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment, and victimisation, and any
- other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected
- characteristic and those who do not.
- Fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic
- and those who do not.

We are firmly committed to achieving equality for all, valuing diversity as a business imperative. We continuously strive to create a positive environment, representative of and responsive to different cultures and groups, where everyone has an equal chance to succeed. This commitment is fully endorsed by all staff, the Company Leadership Group, and the Board.

The Company provides vital education and employment services, dedicated to breaking down barriers to prosperity and fostering social mobility. We offer flexible, tailored support to young people and adults from all walks of life, including school leavers, employees seeking career development, and anyone facing challenges such as socio-economic disadvantage, long-term unemployment, health conditions, or other life-changing circumstances that have hindered their journey into work. This Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy is fundamental to how we operate, ensuring its principles are deeply embedded in everything we do, from recruitment and the delivery of apprenticeships and adult education to our crucial work with employers, apprentices, and partners. The Company, alongside our delivery partners, champions wider inclusion by actively creating opportunities for disadvantaged and under-represented learners, thereby widening participation across all our learning programmes. The Company is unequivocally equity-focused, striving to provide what each individual needs to succeed.

By assessing, recruiting, and developing talent from the widest pool, we gain insight into different cultures and communities and generate greater creativity in supporting learners, customers, and employees alike. The Company considers and applies this policy in everything it does.

We all have a responsibility to embrace and support this vision and must continue to challenge behaviour and attitudes that prevent us from achieving this. Using fair, objective, and innovative practices, we aim to ensure that:

- All individuals are treated fairly and with respect at all stages of our interaction with them, including ensuring that activities are fully accessible to people with disabilities.
- All individuals have the right to be free from harassment and bullying of any description or any other unwanted behaviour, whether based on sex, transgender status, marital status, civil partnership status, pregnancy, race, disability, age, political or religious belief, or sexuality.
- Learners, customers, and employees have an equal chance to contribute to achieving their potential, irrespective of any defining feature that may give rise to unfair discrimination. The Company meets our legislative obligations to publish statutory calculations such as gender pay gap reporting and endeavours to monitor progress towards any key objectives relating to representation and performance of different groups (sex, race, disability, age).
- The diversity of the communities we serve is reflected at all levels in our learner, customer, and employee profile.

Understanding the Terms

Equality - Equality is about creating a society where everyone can participate and can fulfil their potential without fear of prejudice and discrimination. It is about ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents, removing barriers and ensuring fairness.

Diversity - Diversity means difference. It is about recognising, valuing, and celebrating the differences between people. This includes a multitude of visible and non-visible differences, backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences, treating people as individuals and valuing our diversity.

Inclusion - Inclusion is about creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, respected, supported, and able to participate fully and authentically. It's about feeling like you belong.

Equity - Equity recognises that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome. It’s about fairness and understanding that treating everyone the same (equality) isn't enough if people start from different places. Equity involves tailored support to address specific disadvantages.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) defines an equal society as one which: 'Protects and promotes the central and valuable freedoms and real opportunities of each person, securing human rights for all and ensuring that no-one is unfairly disadvantaged. In an equal society, central and valuable freedoms and real opportunities are not unconstrained but are limited by the need to guarantee the same freedoms and opportunities for all. In an equal society, institutions and individuals respect the diversity of people and their goals, address their different needs and situation, and remove the barriers that limit what people can do and can be'.

The EHRC defines three aspects of equality:

1. Equality of outcomes
2. Equality of process (fair treatment, or being treated with dignity and respect)
3. Equality of autonomy (empowerment, or the degree of choice and control)
We seek a 'whole systems' approach to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Policy and legal considerations

The Equality Act 2010 replaces and incorporates all existing anti-discrimination laws with a single act. The Company's policy and single equality scheme incorporates theprotected characteristics listed below, and our equality scheme includes specific targets to achieve strategic outcomes for each. We also recognise our obligations under other relevant UK legislation, including but not limited to the Human Rights Act 1998, Data Protection Act 2018 (GDPR), and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

We are also committed to monitoring and adapting this policy to future legislative changes and best practice guidance, such as potential developments around socio-economic duty or further expansions of protected characteristics.

Age - Age diversity within the workplace is promoted and valued through:

- Challenging age stereotyping.
- Recognising the benefits of a mixed-age community.
- Targeting specific underrepresented age groups, e.g., 50+ group, and actively promoting initiatives for career change coaching, transferable skills audits, financial planning, and introduction to sector pathways.

Disability - The abilities of people are recognised and valued at all levels through:

- Ensuring that activities are fully accessible to people with disabilities.
- Encouraging people to disclose their learning difficulties and/or disabilities.
- Focusing on what people can do rather than what they cannot.
- Challenging stereotypes about disability.
- Making appropriate reasonable adjustments to help people with disabilities achieve their full career and learning potential.

Sex (Gender) - We are committed to ensuring equitable representation and support for individuals of all sexes and genders across all levels within Smart Energy. This includes:

- Challenging harmful gender stereotypes and biases.
- Actively tackling gender segregation in roles and industries.
- Supporting all individuals in balancing their work and personal lives, including through flexible working arrangements.
- Providing comprehensive support for individuals during pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption, and shared parental leave, ensuring a smooth and supportive transition back into the workplace.

Gender Reassignment - We unequivocally promote gender identity equality and inclusion, taking proactive steps to:

- Actively tackle all forms of gender identity discrimination.
- Provide comprehensive support and protection for individuals who are proposing to undergo, are undergoing, or have undergone gender reassignment, ensuring they are fully protected against all forms of discrimination, harassment, and victimisation. This commitment extends to transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals.

Marriage & Civil Partnership - We aim to ensure that all employees are treated fairly and with dignity and respect whether they are married, in a civil partnership, or single.

Pregnancy & Maternity - We aim to provide an environment where employees are supported and treated fairly and with dignity and respect during pregnancy and maternity and while breastfeeding.

Race - We are dedicated to ensuring that the rich racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity of our communities is equitably represented and celebrated at all levels within Smart Energy. This involves:

- Actively challenging and dismantling racial stereotyping, bias, and prejudice.
- Deeply understanding, respecting, and valuing the myriads of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences.
- Proactively promoting race equality and anti-racism throughout our programmes of education and training, customer support, and internal operations.
- We acknowledge the ongoing discussions around caste discrimination and commit to staying informed of any future legislative developments in this area.

Religion or Belief - People are treated fairly at Smart Energy irrespective of their religious beliefs (or non-belief) and practices or political opinions by:

- Recognising an individual's freedom of belief and right to protection from intolerance and persecution.
- Providing a safe environment where learners, customers, and employees can raise issues and share differences.

Sexual Orientation - We ensure that all individuals are treated fairly and with dignity and respect, irrespective of their sexual orientation. Our commitment includes:

- Proactively promoting equality, inclusion, and acceptance for all LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and others) employees, learners, and customers.
- Respecting and celebrating diverse lifestyles, relationships, and identities.
- Challenging and eradicating negative stereotypical views and biphobia/homophobia.

Responsibility

All employees are responsible for equality and diversity across the business, ensuring their behaviours are aligned to our values and our policy and procedures.

All individuals within the Company have a responsibility to comply with this policy and have a positive attitude to ensure success. All the Company's delivery partners are expected to hold the same responsibility and commitment and to promote equality in line with legal requirements. The Company promotes the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy through its culture, recognising and actively valuing differences. The policy is easily accessible to all staff, available through our intranet, and each employee is made aware of the policy and its importance at the start of their employment and throughout employment with training and development activities alongside the promotion of the principles of the policy through our values and behaviours.

All employees are legally obliged to:

- Act appropriately in line with the Company Code of Conduct.
- Promptly report all incidents where the guidance in this document has not been followed, or where they experience or witness discrimination, harassment, or victimisation.
- Undertake mandatory Equality and Diversity e-learning on induction, refreshed annually, and undertake any additional training associated with their role.
- Ensure that learners and customers know who and how to report issues or concerns regarding bullying, harassment, victimisation, or discrimination.

All Managers have the responsibility to:

- Foster a workplace environment where employees are free to be themselves.
- Take appropriate action and intervene in cases where policy is breached.
- Undertake mandatory Equality and Diversity e-learning on induction and refreshed annually, and any additional training relevant to roles.
- Ensure that employees, learners, and customers know who and how to report issues or concerns regarding bullying, harassment, victimisation, or discrimination.
- Communicate to employees, learners, customers, and Delivery Partners as necessary, ensuring that Policies and Processes are understood, and that relevant training takes place.

All employees, learners, and customers will learn about the importance of good relations and have a responsibility to co-operate and comply with any measures set out to improve or sustain the concept of equality and diversity and report any breaches in Policy.

Any employees found to be in breach of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy and/or relevant legislation will be dealt with through the formal disciplinary procedure.

The Company expects its Delivery Partners to have the relevant Policies and Procedures in place and follow the principles as in this document. This is checked through due diligence and included in the monthly meeting agenda.

The Prevent Duty

The Government introduced the Counterterrorism and Security Act 2015, and as part of this, the Prevent Duty – Anti-terrorism strategy was implemented on 1st July 2015.

The Prevent Duty is a crucial aspect of our safeguarding commitment, focused on protecting our learners and customers from being drawn into terrorism and radicalisation. This duty is not intended to restrict legitimate political or religious expression, but rather to support individuals in addressing their concerns and acting on their beliefs in ways that are non-extremist and respect the rule of law.

Training and guidance are in place for employees, customers, and learners so they understand the signs of radicalisation or extremism and what to do if they are concerned about a learner, customer, or colleague. All employees complete online training to understand the Prevent Duty.

Freedom of speech is something we value at the Company. Challenging ideology which may threaten freedom of speech is a collective responsibility and is also about being confident in the Fundamental British Values which are:

- Democracy
- Rule of law
- Individual liberty
- Mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith

We need to protect our learners, customers, employees, and any adults at risk; therefore, if there are concerns relating to any of our employees regarding the Prevent Duty or British Values, the normal reporting procedures for Safeguarding issues should be followed, which is to contact the Safeguarding & Wellbeing Deputy or log a concern on the Tootoot platform. Please refer to the Company Safeguarding Policy and Procedure and Guidance for more detailed guidance.

Trade Unions

At the Company, we recognise the support and service that trade unions can provide employees. Although we do not formally recognise a union, if you are interested in becoming a member of a Trade Union, please speak to Sue or Sarah in the People Department.

Accreditations

We are proud of our robust commitment to Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion, which is externally validated through a range of prestigious accreditations. These achievements underscore our dedication to best practice and continuous improvement:

Disability Confident - This shows that we are an Employer who plays a leading role in changing attitudes for the better and that we are changing behaviour and cultures in our business, networks, and communities; the Company is committed to equality in the workplace.

Ban the Box - We are registered with Ban the Box, removing the tick box from our application process. This takes away the opportunity for our employees to immediately judge an applicant because they have a criminal record. Instead, they see their suitability for the role first. We ask the question about criminal records later in the recruitment process if it is applicable.

Stonewall - We are now Stonewall Diversity Champions and are the first training provider to be. The programme is the leading employers' programme for ensuring all LGBTQ+ employees are accepted without exception in the workplace.

Mindful Employer - We have signed the Mindful Employer Charter to develop and embed good practice in workplace mental health.

Leaders in Safeguarding - The gold award that we have is an award that celebrates and supports achievement in highly effective and robust safeguarding arrangements. It is awarded to organisations in recognition of their provision, practice, and commitment to keep children, young people, and vulnerable adults safe.

Best Large Workplaces for Wellbeing 2022 - As part of the externally accredited Great Place to Work UK, we are the 6th best place to work for wellbeing (large companies) for 2022.

Best Large Workplaces for Women 2022 - As part of the externally accredited Great Place to Work UK, we are the 1st best place to work for wellbeing (large companies) for 2022.

UK's best Large Workplaces 2022 - We have been externally recognised as a Great Place to Work and have come 20th in the large companies category.

Monitoring and Review

The Company will seek to ensure that our policies and procedures are reviewed regularly to ensure that they do not have a negative impact on any groups of people. A formal annual review of the policy takes place which is complemented by ongoing checks by the People team to ensure alignment and compliance to emerging policy, legislation changes and/ or best practice.

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