



Name of Policy: EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY	Approved By: RCGB ref. MJH
Date Last Updated: Nov 2022	Review Date: Nov 2024

CONTEXT

River Church recognises the value of equal opportunities and seeks, wherever possible, to follow the guidelines drawn up by the relevant statutory body.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all River Church employees and aims to provide information concerning equal opportunities and to provide guidelines for staff on good practice.

DEFINITIONS

Although there may be circumstances justifying different treatment regarding staff appointments, which are not unlawful (for example, to comply with an occupational requirement for a position), River Church will not tolerate unlawful discrimination and / or harassment on the grounds of an individual's sex, race, marital status, colour, ethnic or national origin, disability, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, age, religious belief, union membership, union activities, or employment status. Any reference to discrimination in this policy includes all such possible grounds.

BIBLICAL BASIS

The following scripture has influenced the development of this policy:

"There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female. For you are all Christians - you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28)

POLICY

River Church is a Christian organisation which seeks 'To bring the life of Jesus and His kingdom wherever we are' (Ezekiel 47:9). Those who work on River Church staff team must be in sympathy with, and promote, our Christian vision, goals, values and beliefs as set out in our Code of Conduct, which is available on SharePoint.

For some posts within River Church, more than a loyalty to the Christian ethos of the Church is required and these posts are recognised as having Occupational Requirements. See our Equal Opportunities: Justifiability Policy, appended to this document, for further details.

River Church recognises that the UK has a rich diversity of cultures from around the world and seeks to bring Christian witness equally to all cultures. Accordingly, we are committed to equal opportunity, and it is our policy to treat job applicants, staff team members, our community of believers, the wider Christian community, suppliers and partners in the towns we are located and throughout the UK in the same way, subject to requiring staff team members to adhere to our Code of Conduct.

IMPLEMENTATION

River Church is an equal opportunity employer. Equal opportunity is about ensuring good employment practices and efficient use of our most valuable resources, our employees. Every trustee and employee has a personal responsibility for implementing the policy. Any instance of doubt about the application of this policy, or other questions, should be directed to the Church Leader.

This policy applies to the advertisement of vacancies, recruitment and selection, training, conditions of work, pay and to all other aspect of employment. (Employees or trustees involved in recruitment should request training if they have any doubt about the application of this policy.)

Any member of staff may use the Individual Grievance Procedure available HR Policies folder on the shared drive to raise issues of discriminatory conduct. If the matter relates to unlawful harassment then the grievance may be raised directly with the Church Leader or a member of the Board of Trustees. We are concerned to ensure that staff feel able to raise such grievances and that no individual will be penalised for raising such a grievance unless it is untrue and made in bad faith.

The policy also applies equally to the treatment of our church family, the wider Christian community, suppliers and partners in the towns we are located and throughout the UK. Any concern related to the unequal treatment of any of these groups should be directed to the Church Leader.

Any employee who unlawfully harasses any other staff team member in the course of their employment will be subject to our Bullying and Harassment Policy, and potentially, the Disciplinary Policy and Procedure.

While we always undertake to respond with integrity and compassion in disciplinary issues, with the ultimate hope of restoration, we recognise that in serious cases, behaviour such as unlawful harassment will be deemed to constitute gross misconduct and, as such, may result in summary dismissal in the absence of mitigating circumstances.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES STATEMENT

This Equal Opportunities Statement and Equal Opportunities Policy reflect River Church's mission, goals, values and beliefs and the spirit and intentions of legislation which outlaws discrimination.

River Church will not unlawfully discriminate or subject any individual (job applicant or employee) to less favourable treatment.

River Church aims to ensure that people with disabilities are given equal opportunity to enter employment. In doing so, we will fully consider making reasonable adjustments to working practices, equipment and premises to ensure that a disabled person is not put at a substantial disadvantage due to their disability.

In addition, if employees become disabled in the course of their employment, every effort will be made through reasonable adjustment, retraining or redeployment to enable them to remain in River Church's employment.

After taking into account any occupational requirement, entry into employment and promotion or change of post within River Church is determined by personal merit and ability, relevant to our vision and goals.

It is the responsibility of every individual, both staff and volunteer, to eliminate discrimination by ensuring the practical application of the Equal Opportunities Policy and reporting concerns about any possible breach of this policy to the Church Leader.

All allegations of discrimination (including harassment) will be treated seriously. Any unlawful discrimination is totally unacceptable to River Church and any staff team member found to have been acting in such a way will face disciplinary action.

LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES

Code of Conduct
Disciplinary
Individual Grievance

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES: JUSTIFIABILITY POLICY

SCOPE

This policy applies to all River Church posts, full-time and part-time, temporary and permanent.

CONTEXT

The Equality Act 2010 states that it is illegal to discriminate on grounds of religion and belief, with the exception where an organisation's purpose and ethos is based on a religion or belief, and there is an Occupational Requirement (OR) for post holders to share and uphold that particular religion or belief.

River Church's vision is 'To bring the life of Jesus and His kingdom wherever we are' (Ezekiel 47:9). Our Code of Conduct sets out expectations of the attitudes and behaviours of staff team members, as well as the biblical values which underpin River Church's culture. All staff team members and those wishing to join the team are required to sign an agreement to uphold the standards of personal conduct and working practice set out in the Code of Conduct.

DEFINITIONS

Positions which have an OR are those where it is justified only to employ someone with a personal faith in Jesus.

CRITERIA FOR OCCUPATIONAL REQUIREMENT

There will always be an OR to employ people who have a personal faith in Jesus in senior, church based positions as these individuals have a representative role and determine the direction of each of the River churches.

Similarly, posts where the following responsibilities are identified in Job Descriptions and Person Specifications will necessarily always be filled by Christians, due to their potentially significant impact on the vision and ethos of River Church:

- Making policy decisions, which determine the direction River Church
- Making strategy decisions, which determine the direction of River Church
- Representing River Church to the wider community and public
- Representing River Church to its community of believers, to supporters and partners
- Sharing and expressing River Church's vision regarding theological or social issues either verbally or in writing
- Leading a team

- Leading prayer, worship or Bible study

PROCEDURE

When a position becomes vacant, the line manager, along with the Church Leader, will review the Job Description and Person Specification, and assess whether the post has an OR attached to it, based on the above criteria. Any change will be referred to the wider, cross-church Leadership Team).

If the post initially appears to have an OR, the following issues will be considered:

- Are the elements which require an OR central and proportional to the overall role?
- Could the elements that require an OR reasonably be delegated to another role?

If the elements which require an OR are a minor part of the role, or they are able to be delegated to a post which has an existing OR, these adjustments will be made and the position will be open to those who do not have a personal faith in Jesus.

Staff who are not Christians will still be required to be sympathetic with the aims of the organisation and uphold the Code of Conduct (with the exception of the specific requirements relating to faith - based activity e.g. church attendance).

If the post does have an OR, then this will be stated in the Job Description and Person Specification, and the job advert, and those applying for the position will be required to sign their agreement to the Code of Conduct.

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