



**Higher Education Services
Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
Policy**

July 2025

DOCUMENT INFORMATION AND VERSION CONTROL

Name of policy/procedure:	Higher Education Services Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
Document owner:	Academic Registrar
Date of creation:	28 th July 2025
Equality Impact Assessment date and reference:	28 th July 2025
Date of last review:	28 th July 2025
Reviewed by:	Prof. Dr Alison Watson
Date of next review:	28 th July 2028
Related documents:	Brunel University, Equality and Diversity Policy March 2023 Roehampton University, Equality and Diversity Policy

Version	Author	Date	Brief summary of changes
1	A. Watson	28/07/25	Original version

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Higher Education Services Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Policy

1.0 Introduction

1.1 FutureLearn is dedicated to continuously improving its processes and approaches by collaborating with its diverse students and colleagues. It persists in providing development opportunities to raise awareness of EDI and equip everyone with practical skills for inclusivity. FutureLearn encourages its community to confidently voice concerns and highlight areas for improvement. Its commitment extends to celebrating the unique characteristics of student and colleague communities and sharing best practices externally to inspire greater inclusivity within the higher education sector.

1.2 FutureLearn is committed to providing equal opportunities for colleagues, students and applicants, and it does not tolerate any discriminatory behaviour with respect to:

- Race, including skin colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, accent, culture, appearance and clothing
- Religion, spirituality or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity and/or gender reassignment
- Marital or civil partnership status
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Age
- Disability, including neurodiversity and mental health

1.3 These characteristics align with the protected characteristics defined in the [Equality Act 2010](#).

1.4 FutureLearn is also committed to supporting colleagues and students who have minority characteristics or challenging circumstances that may not be protected by law. These include:

- Refugees and forced migrants
- Carers
- Care-experienced people
- People with challenging socio-economic circumstances

1.5 FutureLearn is dedicated to a people-first approach rooted in the social model of inclusion. It understands that disadvantage stems not from individual characteristics, but from the societal structures and limitations that surround us. That's why it focuses on breaking down barriers and creating opportunities, so everyone has the chance to thrive. Its commitment is ongoing and it is continually refining strategies and practices to challenge discrimination in all its forms.

1.6 These align with the following categories according to the Equality Act 2010:

- **Direct discrimination involves treating a person less favourably because of a protected characteristic** (for example not promoting an individual because of their race or sexual orientation). It includes discrimination because of perceptions or assumptions about a person's characteristics, even if these are incorrect (for example, not supporting a learner because they are assumed to be gay). It also includes discrimination because a person associates with someone who has a protected characteristic (for example, not entering an individual onto a programme because they have a disabled child).

- Direct discrimination cannot be justified (except for discrimination).
- **Indirect discrimination occurs when an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice is applied across all groups, but this would put those with a particular protected characteristic at a particular disadvantage when compared with others who do not share this characteristic** (for example imposing a requirement that applicants must be over six foot tall, which would particularly disadvantage women). Indirect discrimination will not be unlawful if it can be justified.
- **Harassment is unwanted conduct related to a protected characteristic or of a sexual nature** which has the purpose or effect of:
 - Violating an individual's dignity.
 - Creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.
- **Victimisation has a particular legal meaning and involves subjecting a person to a detriment because an individual has complained about discrimination or assisted somebody else in doing so.**

1.7 It is not normally an answer to an allegation of discrimination to say that the discrimination was not intentional or deliberate.

1.8 This policy outlines our dedication to EDI, and our ongoing efforts to promote an inclusive environment for both colleagues and learners at FutureLearn. It is to be read alongside the EDI policies of our university partners:

- Brunel University (BU), [Equality and Diversity Policy March 2023](#) and [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion | Brunel University of London](#)
- Roehampton University (RU), [Equality and Diversity Policy](#)

2.0 Identity

2.1 FutureLearn believes everyone should feel empowered to bring their whole selves to work and study. FutureLearn proudly upholds a commitment to respecting and celebrating the diverse identities that enrich its community of colleagues and students. In practice, this respect includes the commitments laid out in the following paragraphs.

2.2 FutureLearn respects the language people use to describe themselves regarding disability, neurodiversity, race, ethnicity, or other identities, and aims to mirror their terms, avoiding imposed or outdated labels. It uses inclusive language in its teaching, guidance, and policies, and approaches ethnicity and disability with care for individual experiences, not broad categories. FutureLearn affirms that trans rights are human rights and supports trans and non-binary students and colleagues by respecting pronouns, avoiding dead names, and building systems to reflect this. FutureLearn acknowledges the learning curve involved and shows patience. It honours all beliefs, faiths, spiritualities, and non-faiths without judgment. FutureLearn values academic freedom and free speech provided they don't harm or endanger those with protected characteristics. Speech must respect human rights and cannot excuse hate or incitement.

2.3 FutureLearn is dedicated to offering supportive environments tailored to its colleagues' and students' needs such as access to navigational support through maps or personal assistance. To uphold its inclusive culture, it will take appropriate developmental or disciplinary steps when individuals deliberately disregard these principles.

3.0 Accessibility and Reasonable Adjustments

3.1 FutureLearn is dedicated to championing inclusion for disabled and neurodiverse students and colleagues. It strives to embed accessibility into the core design of its courses, learning journeys, and workplace practices. Where feasible, it will adapt its processes to meet individual needs ensuring these adjustments uphold the quality and academic rigour of its programmes.

3.2 Reasonable adjustments may include, but are not limited to:

- Digital accessibility of our VLE and learning materials.
- Transcripts and captions of media.
- Trigger or content warnings on potentially distressing content.
- Guidance and ongoing professional development and support for colleagues around inclusive teaching.

3.3 FutureLearn prides itself in providing an accessible platform offering learners alternative methods to access content, specifics on this can be found in its [Accessibility and Inclusion Policy](#).

3.4 Responsive reasonable adjustments will be made in agreement between the learner, FutureLearn and its university partner. Examples could include:

- Special arrangements in examinations or assessments.
- Alternative formats available upon request and as per the Accessibility and Inclusion Policy.
- Support in digital learning through assistive technologies, such as screen readers or magnification software.

3.5 Reasonable adjustments through the recruitment process and to working conditions, will be made as agreed with stakeholders such as line managers, HR Department and Occupational Health Advisors.

4.0 Disclosure

4.1 FutureLearn encourages students and colleagues to share any disabilities, neurodivergent traits, or mental health challenges with it as early as possible to ensure timely and appropriate support. For students, its student services teams will signpost students to the appropriate wellbeing services of partner universities. However, if an urgent or serious need arises, or the situation warrants it, reasonable adjustments may still be offered even if a student has not formally disclosed their condition or connected with the support teams at the partner university. Staff will receive training to help them understand when and how to implement these adjustments confidently. Any requests that may involve more enhanced adjustments may be escalated to the Academic Standards and Quality Committee or other FutureLearn governance boards if it requires a change to policy.

4.2 Disclosures can be made either verbally or in writing to the following:

- Education Advisors within the Admissions team
- Student services team members
- Director of HR (Global University Systems)

5.0 Expectations for Colleagues

5.1 FutureLearn acknowledges that colleagues are entitled to expect certain standards from it. In turn, it also has reasonable expectations of them. FutureLearn has set out its specific policies on various employment situations below.

5.1.1 Recruitment

- All advertising and recruitment literature should reflect its commitment to equal opportunities and not enhance stereotypes. Wherever possible, all vacancies should be advertised simultaneously internally and externally. Where vacancies are to be filled by promotion or transfer, they should be published to all eligible colleagues in such a way that they do not restrict applications from particular groups. Do not rely solely upon “word of mouth” recruitment as this can perpetuate any existing mix of groups within its workforce.
- The recruitment process should not disadvantage people with disabilities or those identifying adjustment needs such as neurodiversity. All reasonable adjustments to the process should be considered (please liaise with the People Department to advise further).
- Selection procedures should be objective. Each candidate should be assessed according to their capability to carry out the job. It should not be assumed that certain groups should perform certain kinds of work or “will not fit in”.
- When considering neurodiverse needs or people with disabilities suitability for the job, they should be assessed on the assumption that any reasonable adjustments will be made (for example, if someone needs a special keyboard and this is a reasonable adjustment, their ability to do the job compared with other candidates should be assessed on the assumption that the keyboard has been provided).
- More than one person should be involved in the recruitment process, and all should have some training in equal opportunities and unconscious bias training.
- The reasons for selection and rejection of candidates should be recorded and scored adequately across all candidates, the HR department can advise on capability interviews and scoring criteria.
- FutureLearn will review and consider adapting recruitment procedures to work towards resolving any ‘diversity debt’. This may include adjustment and updating of interview practices as well as involving existing neurodiverse colleagues as a ‘Champion’ to advise and support the process as appropriate.

5.1.2 Pay and Benefits

- Equal pay should be paid for work of equal value, unless there is a material factor that accounts for the variation. Benefits may include, but are not limited to, enhanced qualifying periods for maternity and paternity leave and flexible working arrangements.
- Benefits should be accessible to all colleagues equally unless there is a good justification for not doing so. The People Department can advise on such matters and may be considered in support of neurodiversity or disability (health adjustments) requirements.

5.1.3 Promotion and Training

- Colleagues should have equal opportunities for promotion and training, and all colleagues should have the opportunity to discuss their future development and promotion prospects with their managers. When general ability and personal qualities are the main requirements for promotion to a post, care should be taken to properly consider candidates with differing career patterns and general experience. There should be no stereotypical assumptions about the ambitions or otherwise of any individual from a particular group.
- Training and development should not stop because someone is pregnant or has caring responsibilities. Nor should it be assumed that such colleagues are not interested in promotion.

- Managers should not base decisions about promotion, training or career development on whether the employee participates in social events with colleagues outside of office hours.

5.1.4 Disciplinary, Performance Improvement and Redundancy Procedures

- Care should be taken to ensure that those with a particular protected characteristic are not sanctioned for performance or behaviour that would be condoned or overlooked in another group. For example, a man who takes emergency time off to deal with a domestic situation should be viewed no less sympathetically than a woman would be viewed in the same circumstances.
- If selection for redundancy becomes necessary, direct and indirect discrimination should not occur in the selection criteria or process. For example, be careful when using absence-related criteria (because these may disadvantage disabled or pregnant workers) and adjustments might need to be made to ensure that such criteria are fair.

5.2 Monitoring Effectiveness

5.2.1 To review and maintain progress against policies and in support of the diversity agenda, the HR department carry out the following equal opportunities monitoring:

- Equal opportunities monitoring forms for all colleagues which includes but is not limited to ethnicity, age, sex and religion.
- Colleague cooperation in this process is valued, as is any feedback or suggestions colleagues may have for improving this policy.

5.3 What to do if you have a complaint?

5.3.1 If colleagues believe that discrimination is taking place, they could speak informally to the person responsible; their manager or the HR department should be notified if it is not resolved informally or to raise further awareness.

6.0 Colleague Responsibilities

6.1 Whilst overall responsibility for this policy rests with the Director of HR (Global University Systems), all Managers are responsible for ensuring that this policy is applied within their own area and all staff that it is adhered to.

6.1.1 Colleagues have a personal responsibility to comply with this policy and do their best to ensure that it is adhered to in day-to-day work. Colleagues must not discriminate or help others to do so in contravention of this policy. Breaches of this policy will be taken seriously and are likely to result in disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Colleagues may also be personally liable towards anyone they unlawfully discriminate against and may have to pay compensation on top of any compensation FutureLearn might be ordered to pay. FutureLearn has a zero tolerance of any form of discrimination.

6.2 Status and Application of this Policy

6.2.1 FutureLearn aims to apply this policy to all those working at FutureLearn, including agency, temporary and freelance staff, as well as employees. Aspects of this policy may need to be applied in different ways to cater to those who are not direct colleagues (such as the sharing of internal vacancies with our freelance staff as appropriate). This policy is not part of any contract of employment and forms part of FutureLearn's

procedures in ensuring fair and equal treatment to all. Any amendments to the policy will be in discussion with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee and will comply with legislative requirements.

7.0 Expectations for Learners

7.1 FutureLearn provides equality of access to all courses and programmes and encourages the recruitment of students from all backgrounds both nationally and internationally. Students can assume that EDI will be integrated into every aspect of their learner lifetime. Students can expect to be treated fairly in the following ways:

- When enrolling on a programme.
- When accessing the content.
- When being assessed.
- When receiving support from academic staff.
- When receiving pastoral support and information from student support teams.
- When accessing support from safeguarding teams.
- When receiving support and wellbeing from partner universities.
- When accessing marketing literature.

7.2 FutureLearn expects its students to behave in a supportive and inclusive manner to all staff and other students. Students must not bully, harass, intimidate or discriminate against other students or colleagues based on their race, skin colour, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age, marital or civil partnership status or disability. Developmental or disciplinary action will be taken when students are found to have committed an act of unlawful discrimination, harassment, bullying or intimidation as per the Student Code of Conduct and Disciplinary Process.

7.3 FutureLearn recognises that EDI is an ever-evolving area, and it remains committed to continuous growth. While it acknowledges it may not always get things right, it is dedicated to a culture of lifelong learning, embracing a compassionate, human-centred, and adaptive approach to EDI amongst its student community.

7.4 FutureLearn will continue to evolve its practices and policies in collaboration with its diverse student community. It is committed to providing ongoing opportunities to build awareness of EDI, and to equip learners with the skills needed to encourage inclusive environments. FutureLearn encourages students to voice their perspectives and help identify areas where FutureLearn can improve. It is proud to champion EDI, celebrate the unique identities within its student body, and share its progress to help advance inclusivity across the higher education sector.

8.0 Monitoring

8.1 EDI will be monitored on an ongoing basis by both the central HR Department and the Academic Governance structure. EDI is a standing item on all academic committee terms of reference and more formally considered at the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. This policy will be reviewed every three years.