

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

1. Introduction

- 1.1 VetSkill is committed to encouraging equity, diversity and inclusion as central to its mission as an Awarding Organisation (AO) and End-point Assessment Organisation (EPAO). The Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011 legally protect people from discrimination in the workplace and in wider society.
- 1.2 Subject to statutory provisions, no student, apprentice, centre, training provider, member of staff, applicant for registration as a learner or apprentice, or applicant for appointment as a member of staff will be treated less favourably than another because of their belonging to a protected group.
- 1.3 The aim is for the VetSkill workforce, centres, training providers, learners and apprentices to promote equity, fairness and respect and be truly representative of all sections of society.

2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all VetSkill staff, contractors, centre and training provider personnel, learners and apprentices. This policy will apply to former learners, apprentices, centre and training provider personnel and VetSkill staff and contractors where any alleged unlawful conduct arises out of, or is closely connected to, the individual's relationship with VetSkill.

3. Policy Purpose

- 3.1 VetSkill will not unlawfully discriminate directly or indirectly in recruitment or employment because of the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristics of: age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race (including colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin), religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 3.2 VetSkill will not discriminate directly or indirectly, or harass employees, contractors, learners, apprentices, training providers, employers or clients because of the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation, in the provision of goods and services.
- 3.3 VetSkill will not allow for the concept of associative discrimination, where an individual is directly discriminated against or harassed for an association with another individual who has a protected characteristic.
- 3.4 VetSkill will not allow direct discrimination against, or harass anyone, based on a perception that they have a particular protected characteristic when they do not, in fact, have that protected characteristic.
- 3.5 VetSkill will take all reasonable steps to prevent harassment by a third party, for example an assessor, a provider, an employer or employee, or a learner or apprentice. Any reported incident involving a third party will be investigated and dealt with in accordance with VetSkill's *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy*.
- 3.6 No employee or contractor will be disadvantaged, such as being denied a training opportunity or a promotion because they have made or supported a complaint, or have raised a grievance under the Equality Act 2010, or because they are suspected of doing so, or being about to do so.

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- 3.7 VetSkill is committed to the provision of equity of opportunity and diversity for all, and continues to formulate and implement policies and practices to this end.

4. Responsibility

- 4.1 Overall responsibility for the *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy* within VetSkill lies with the VetSkill Board and Operations Committee for ensuring that the policy is implemented within their areas of responsibility. The relevant member of staff will provide reports and relevant documents, maintaining VetSkill's awareness of statutory equality duties.
- 4.2 All other members of the Operations Committee, or their representatives, are responsible for taking any action or decisions relating to equity, diversity and inclusion in relation to employment matters, coordinating the monitoring of the effectiveness of this policy, and providing general guidance in relation to this policy.
- 4.3 VetSkill will ensure that all learners, apprentices, centres, training providers, employers or members of staff are made aware of this policy and its procedures. All employees and contractors of VetSkill are responsible for ensuring that their actions are carried out within the terms of the General Policy (Section 1) and codes of practice; they may be held personally accountable should any complaint arise.
- 4.4 The development and monitoring of the policy are supported by VetSkill's Chief Executive Officer and Director of Operations, who are responsible for developing and coordinating initiatives that will enhance equity, diversity, and inclusion within VetSkill.
- 4.5 The Operations Committee are responsible for ensuring that venues are accessible to all staff, contractors, learners, apprentices and visitors.

- 4.6 For practical activities, employers/training providers are responsible for ensuring that their venues used for End-point Assessment are accessible and meet with legislative requirements.
- 4.7 VetSkill's HR Manager is responsible for advising on VetSkill's grievance procedures.
- 4.8 Staff responsible for developing and reviewing End-point Assessment documentation should ensure due consideration is given to equity, diversity and inclusion issues.
- 4.9 Assessment and quality assurance staff are responsible for ensuring any End-point Assessment documentation and support materials reflect sensitivity to equity, diversity and inclusion.
- 4.10 All staff are responsible for ensuring that inappropriate behaviour is challenged and reported.
- 4.11 Centres and training providers are responsible that they have in place a robust and reliable Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy that is clearly signposted to staff, learners and apprentices and that the institution monitors the make-up of workforce and learner and apprentice groups to encourage equity, diversity and inclusion, and to ensure it is meeting its aims and commitments set out in its Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.
- 4.12 Apprentices, learners, centres, employers and training providers are responsible for ensuring that they are aware of VetSkill's *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy* and understand its purpose and aims.
- 4.13 Apprentices, learners, centres, employers and training providers are responsible for accepting and promoting equity, diversity and inclusion.

- 4.14 Apprentices, learners, centres, employers and training providers must recognise that inappropriate behaviour will be challenged and reported, whether in a learning or training environment, or at a work placement.

5. Application

5.1 The General Policy (Section 1) relates to all aspects of the employment and learning environments, including advertisement, recruitment, pay, terms and conditions of service, training, secondment, redeployment, benefits, promotions, grievances and disciplinary procedures, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, centre approvals, and admissions practices. VetSkill will consider equity, diversity and inclusion implications when entering into contractual relationships with other organisations, such as collaborative programmes.

- People not employed by VetSkill but who are involved in VetSkill's activities, such as assessors, visitors, clients, external contractors, and so on, are expected to operate within the terms of the General Policy (Section 1).
- The policy applies to the treatment of existing, as well as potential employees, and apprentices, learners, centres, employers and training providers.
- Wherever possible, VetSkill will use the *ACAS codes of practice* guidelines to support application of the policy.
- Application of the policy will be aligned to the requirements of VetSkill's regulators and other regulatory requirements, such as the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons (RCVS), Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), and AO and EPAO external quality assurance bodies.

5.2 VetSkill respects the dignity and diversity of all our apprentices, learners, centres, training providers, employers and employees, regardless of personal characteristics and differences. It is our aim to give everyone fair and appropriate access to the greatest opportunity, and we will employ positive action, and/or make reasonable adjustments to develop and fulfil an individual's potential. We value the contribution each person can make to VetSkill. We believe that treating people fairly, and with dignity and respect, is right and makes good business sense.

This means that VetSkill will:

- not tolerate any form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation, on any grounds
- provide appropriate, sensitive and accessible services to everyone
- work with stakeholders to eradicate prejudice, discrimination, harassment and negative stereotyping
- support campaigns for local and national initiatives which treat people equally and which protect groups from discrimination
- ensure that everybody who studies, or is assessed at or with VetSkill, is respected and valued
- make reasonable adjustments for disabled learners, apprentices and staff to ensure fair access to services and opportunities
- ensure that any subcontractors, including other employers, commit to VetSkill's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion agenda by advancing equity and challenging discrimination
- promote and support the use of a range of flexible working patterns to enable those working for VetSkill to balance home and work responsibilities
- support people in a phased return to work after extended periods of absence

- treat people fairly, and develop staff, contractors, learners and apprentices so that they are able to reach their full potential.

6. Implementation

- 6.1 Consultation with staff, contractors, learners, apprentices, centres, employers and training providers will be a necessary part of implementing the General Policy (Section 1) and the specific policies and procedures.
- 6.2 Staff, contractors, learners, apprentices, employers and providers will be informed of their responsibilities in relation to promotion and implementation of the *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy* its procedures during their introduction to VetSkill, and at various intervals during their ongoing relationship.
- 6.3 Appropriate training will be provided to assist with implementation of the policy.
- 6.4 Advice on the implementation of the specific policies will be available from the Chief Executive Officer and the Director of Operations.
- 6.5 VetSkill will continue to conduct comprehensive and effective monitoring of all aspects of staffing and the learner and apprentice population. VetSkill is committed to the collection of statistics, analysis of data, and presentation of data, as well as monitoring this on an on-going basis. VetSkill will continue to monitor and act upon areas of concern and/or disparity with regard to equity, diversity and inclusion in respect of learner and apprentice success, withdrawal, achievement, representation, and all aspects of learner and apprentice, and centre, employer and training provider feedback.
- 6.6 VetSkill will adopt the best practice in light of both internal and external research and experience.
- 6.7 VetSkill will ensure that appropriate action is taken in the case of complaint.

7. Complaints

7.1 Any complaint made regarding equity, diversity and inclusion shall be dealt with under the terms of the appropriate complaints procedures, bearing in mind the need to safeguard individuals. Staff, contractors, learners, apprentices, centres, employers or training providers who feel that they have experienced discrimination from third-party members will receive support from VetSkill, who will take appropriate action where discrimination has been confirmed.

- **Learners and apprentices** should pursue this in accordance with VetSkill's *Complaints Procedure*.
- **Employees/contractors** who wish to make a formal complaint can find further details in the *Staff Handbook* on the VetSkill Intranet. They may also seek advice from the HR.
- **Parents/carers** with apprentices under the age of 18 years should feel free to approach their young person's training provider or employer.
- **Other third parties, employers, and members of the community** can address their concerns by writing to: The Responsible Officer, Vet Skill Ltd, Unit 10 Ramsay Court, Hinchbrook Business Park, Huntingdon, PE29 6FY.

Details of VetSkill's Grievance and Disciplinary Policies are available for staff and contractors on the VetSkill intranet. This includes with whom an employee should raise a grievance.

Use of VetSkill's grievance or disciplinary procedure does not affect an employees right to make a claim to an employment tribunal within 3 months of the alleged discrimination.

Review Arrangements and Version Control:

This version of VetSkill's *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy* replaces all previous versions of VetSkill's *Equity and Diversity* policies for both awarding and end-point assessment personnel. This document is subject to regular revision and is maintained electronically by its owner. Electronic copies are version controlled. Printed copies are not subject to this control. VetSkill will review this policy regularly as part of internal continuous improvement processes and will revise it as and when necessary in response to customer and learner/apprentice feedback, changes in our practices, actions from the regulatory authorities or external agencies, changes in legislation, or trends identified from previous situations.

Documented changes from previous version	
Section	Change
Throughout	Terminology changed to incorporate AO and EPAO staff and stakeholders.
Footer Table	Enhancement to policy document format – version control.