



Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Policy name	Equity, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
Policy summary	This policy explains our approach towards achieving equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EEDI) for staff, volunteers and everyone who works with the MS Society. It sets out our policy on EEDI as well as our EEDI principles which are applied across all our work.
Policy owner/ Responsible Director	Executive Director of Corporate Services
Policy lead	Head of EEDI
Audience	All staff, volunteers and others who work on behalf of the MS Society
Key Consultation:	EDI activity group, Head of HR, EDI reference group, Executive Group
Approver	Board of Trustees
Recommended by	Strategic Implementation & Finance Committee
Approval/effective date	May 2025
Approval Cycle	3 years
Next review	2028

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This policy sets out our approach to equity, equality, diversity and inclusion (EEDI) as an organisation, but also our EEDI expectations of the people who we work alongside.
- 1.2 At the MS Society, we are committed to driving fairness and inclusion for the MS community so that everyone can live well. We recognise that **equality**—treating everyone the same—is essential, but it does not always address the unique challenges faced by people living with MS especially those who also belong to other marginalised communities. That’s why we sometimes focus on **equity**, ensuring that support, resources, and opportunities are tailored to individual needs. By balancing equity and equality, we work toward a future where everyone affected by MS can live their best life.
- 1.3 Our approach applies both **internally**—by fostering an inclusive workplace where our team has the support to thrive—and **externally**, by advocating for fair access to care, services, and opportunities for the MS community.

Definitions

- 1.4 **Equality** is "ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents" (The Equality and Human Rights Commission). To ensure nobody is treated less fairly because of their characteristics or identity. The Equality Act 2010 requires a proactive approach to make reasonable adjustments that address the visible and invisible barriers people with protected characteristics face; treating people fairly according to their needs and goals.
 - 1.5 **Equity** involves recognising and addressing the unique needs and barriers that different individuals or groups may face, to achieve greater fairness of treatment and outcomes. It recognises that everyone doesn't start from the same place, and we acknowledge and make adjustments to address imbalances.
 - 1.6 **Diversity** is recognising and valuing the differences between people. It acknowledges and values the variety of perspectives and experiences that contribute to a rich and inclusive environment. People with different identities, backgrounds and experiences should all have equitable access to resources and decision making. This also involves being active in taking steps to challenge under-representation.
 - 1.7 **Inclusion** involves creating an environment where all individuals feel respected, valued and empowered to fully participate and contribute. It ensures diverse voices are heard, different perspectives are considered, and everyone feels a sense of belonging; making everyone feel valued and encouraged to achieve their full potential. Creating safe spaces where people feel able to be their authentic selves. Spaces where people feel they belong and that together we can achieve extraordinary things for the MS community. It involves being proactive to make sure people of different backgrounds, experiences and identities feel welcomed, respected and fully able to participate.
 - 1.8 **Positive action** is taking positive steps to overcome and minimise disadvantage, discrimination and marginalisation experienced by members of protected groups. It is important to note that this is different from positive discrimination which occurs when someone is given preferential treatment because of a protected characteristic rather than their skills, knowledge or experience. Like other forms of discrimination, positive discrimination is illegal.
 - 1.9 For other definitions please see appendix 6.
- ## 2 Policy statement
- 2.1 We are committed to creating a world where no one in the UK faces MS alone, no matter who they are.

2.2 We commit to valuing and celebrating the diversity of our community. We will promote equity and equality, ensuring that EEDI is embedded in all we do. We stand against discrimination and will relate to everyone within our community.

Purpose and aims

2.3 Our EEDI policy is critical to ensuring that as much of the MS community as possible can benefit from our work. It will help us build an inclusive culture of support that is welcoming and gives people a sense of belonging. Where we will treat all people with dignity and respect and become fearless allies.

2.4 The policy also plays a vital role in enabling and advancing our charitable objects which are:

- > To support and relieve people affected by MS
- > To encourage people affected by MS to attain their full potential as members of society by improving their conditions of life
- > To promote research into MS and allied conditions and to publish the results.

2.5 We will comply with our legal and external obligations including equality standards set by contracts, regulations, accreditations and good practice schemes.

Our EEDI Principle

2.6 Our organisational work is led by the following five EEDI principles and we will ask that everyone who works with us upholds them:

- > **Accountability** – We want EEDI to be embedded in all our work and a fundamental part of how we operate as an organisation. We know we may not always get it right, but when we do not, we will learn to avoid making the same mistakes. We are all responsible for our actions and behaviours and will be held accountable for our adherence of this EEDI policy.
- > **Authenticity** – We will constantly and mindfully check back with our marginalised colleagues and communities to ensure our actions are authentic and impactful. We support each other to uphold and champion EEDI in our roles. The way we support and manage our staff and volunteers and deliver our services will not discriminate.
- > **Humility** – We are open and honest. We know we do not have all the answers, but we ask the right questions and build relationships with the right people and organisations to become better informed. We listen when challenged. We advocate for change and are an active ally. We acknowledge when we get it wrong. We provide channels for our community to raise concerns and have their voices heard. We will be accessible and inclusive across all our work

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- > **Partnership** – We will partner with those who are better placed to support communities and learn from these partnerships. By standing with and amplifying the voices and work of others we can achieve more for the MS community than we can alone.
- > **Self-reflective** – We will constantly listen, pause, reflect and learn to continue our journey towards inclusivity and equity for the MS community.

Scope

2.7 This policy applies to:

- > all our employees, including people on secondment and who work on our behalf like consultants
- > all our volunteers
- > all our work across the UK
- > all our work with external providers and partners.

2.8 Our approach to equity, equality, diversity and inclusion applies to all conduct including all internal communications and channels (online and in person), meetings, social events and social interactions with staff, other volunteers, members of the MS community or public.

2.9 It also covers any work that may impact on our organisational reputation. This includes the expression of views on social media that go against these commitments and that could be linked to the MS Society.

2.10 We recognise all parts of a person's identity. No one should be treated less favourably because of any personal characteristic. Nine characteristics are set out in the Equality Act 2010. Through The Workers Protection Act 2023 (Equality Act 2010 amendment), we will also put in place steps to prevent sexual harassment for the people who work with us. As a disability charity we recognise the range of experiences of people with different types of MS and at the different stages of MS.

2.11 The characteristics protected by this policy, exceed those within the Equality Act and are:

- > age
- > disability
- > trans and non-binary identities.
- > marriage and civil partnership status
- > pregnancy and maternity status

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- > race (by race we mean colour, nationality, ethnic and national origin)
- > religion or belief (including no religion or belief)
- > sex or gender identity and expression
- > sexual orientation
- > socio-economic status or class
- > geographic background
- > caring responsibilities. This includes caring for a disabled person, older person or child and parental leave.
- > mental health status
- > menopause and periods

Standards

2.12 Our EEDI Standards are:

1. We expect people to use inclusive language.
2. We will recruit staff and volunteers in transparent, merit-based and fair and unbiased ways. Further details are set out in our Recruitment and Selection Policy.
3. We will provide reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of disabled staff. We will also provide them through the recruitment process. Further details are set out in our Reasonable Adjustment procedure.
4. We value diversity and the benefits it brings. We want to create safe spaces free from discrimination, victimisation, bullying and harassment for our staff and volunteers.
5. We will put in place all the reasonable steps we can to prevent any form of prejudice, discrimination or harassment towards our staff, volunteers and partners. This includes and extends beyond racism, sexual harassment, ableism, homophobia, transphobia.
6. We will support anyone who experiences or witnesses' discrimination, bullying or harassment. We will provide routes and support for reporting such incidents. We take all reports seriously and will investigate them promptly and thoroughly. Reports will be dealt with in a sensitive manner, we will make sure to preserve confidentiality as far as possible.
7. We use equality impact assessments to ensure we understand the impact of our work and mitigate any potential risks of discrimination or exclusion of marginalised people.

Dealing with breaches of our EEDI standards

- 2.13 We take breaches of this policy and our EEDI standards very seriously. Breaches may be expressed verbally or in writing, in person or through social media or in any other action or form. Some breaches may break the law. We will take clear action to manage any breaches and support those involved or affected.
- 2.14 No form of discrimination, victimisation, bullying or harassment will be tolerated. If you believe that you may have suffered discrimination because of any of the characteristics protected by this policy, you can:
- talk to your manager, a Staff Representative or a member of the HR team, if you are a member of staff.
 - raise the matter through our Grievance Policy or Resolving Volunteer Issues and Complaints policy as appropriate.
 - also notify Helpline/Supporter Care, Volunteer Manager, Volunteer Support team or our Support and Wellbeing Facilitator if you are a volunteer.
- 2.15 We will investigate reports of breaches of this policy and as far as possible treat such reports as confidential. For:
- staff this will be guided by our code of conduct, Dignity at Work policy and our disciplinary policy.
 - volunteers this will be guided by the code of conduct, our dignity at work policy and resolving volunteer issues policy.
- 2.16 Employers can be held responsible for the discriminatory actions of employees. This is called 'vicarious liability', see definitions (appendix 6).
- 2.17 Anyone who discriminates against someone at work is also responsible for their own actions including those prohibited by this policy. This means that action (including legal action) might be taken against them by the victim. Discrimination complaints and employment tribunal claims can be made against individuals as well as employers.

3 Responsibilities

- 3.1 **Board of Trustees** is responsible for championing equity, equality, diversity and inclusion. They approve our strategic approach to EEDI and ensure that it is consistent with this policy and our values. They also make sure that resources, support and leadership is provided to ensure this policy can be meaningfully implemented.
- 3.2 **Executive Group** is responsible for championing this policy and ensuring compliance with policy and the effective development, implementation and monitoring of our equity, equality, diversity and inclusion within our strategic plans.

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- 3.3 **Head of EEDI** is the policy lead and is responsible for ensuring this policy continues to be fit for purpose and up to date. They will also advise colleagues on equity, equality, diversity and inclusion best practice in line with this policy.
- 3.4 **Leadership Group and line managers** are responsible for implementing this policy. They should also champion and role model inclusive behaviours and allyship. They should support their staff with reasonable adjustments and provide inclusive support to their staff and volunteers.
- 3.5 **Employees, volunteers and others who work on behalf of the MS Society** are responsible for championing equality, equity, diversity and inclusion. They should be active allies and understand how this policy relates to their role, and report cases of discrimination, harassment, and unfair treatment.

4 **Laws and regulations (standard paragraph)**

- 4.1 This policy ensures our compliance with the requirements of relevant UK legislation including the Equality Act 2010 and The Fair Employment and Treatment (Northern Ireland) Order 1998 which also protects against discrimination based on their political opinions.

5 **Monitoring and compliance**

- 5.1 We report on progress against our plans and commitments regularly. We will audit our strategic approach to EEDI and this policy biannually.
- 5.2 We will collect anonymous EEDI data to understand more about the diversity of our staff and volunteers. And the impact that our EEDI strategic approach is having.
- 5.3 Feedback will continue to be sought regularly using existing channels such as our staff networks and groups, our EEDI champions group (staff) and the EEDI reference group (volunteers).
- 5.4 We may sometimes provide anonymous equality and diversity monitoring information to external organisations to meet our contractual obligations or to comply with legislation. For example, to allow us to report on our gender pay gap.

6 **Training and support**

- 6.1 All our staff and volunteers will have access to EEDI training through mandatory and/or recommended routes to assist them to translate the requirements of this policy into practice. This includes an EEDI training programme which supports increasing awareness and understanding of EEDI related issues, use of

appropriate language, building an inclusive culture and challenging behaviours which do not align with this approach.

7 Review and maintenance

- 7.1 This policy will be formally reviewed every 3 years.
- 7.2 The Head of EEDI will monitor and maintain the policy and ensure it reflects best practice.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Where necessary, policies may be supplemented, supported or complemented by other documents. The appendices should include:
- 8.2 Appendix 1: related documents
- 8.3 Appendix 2: document provenance
- 8.4 Appendix 3: equality impact assessment
- 8.5 Appendix 4: privacy impact assessment
- 8.6 Appendix 5: environmental impact assessment
- 8.7 Appendix 6: Definitions



Appendix 1: related documents

Document title	Relationship to this policy
Code of Conduct	This outlines the values and behaviours that we expect anyone working for us or with us to uphold and demonstrate. It is mentioned in this policy but also supports its implementation.
Dignity at Work Policy	This is our policy to ensure that every volunteer and colleague is treated with dignity and respect. It is mentioned in this policy but also forms part of the framework for responding to breaches of this policy.
Disciplinary Policy	This is our policy that sets out how we address unacceptable conduct (including behaviour) matters related to our staff. It is mentioned in this policy but also forms part of the framework for responding to breaches of this policy.
Flexible, Smart and Home Working Policy	This is our policy which sets our entitlements and arrangements for requesting flexible, smart and home working. It supports our approach to create an inclusive working environment.
Grievance Policy	This is our policy that sets out how we address complaints and grievances raised by our staff. It is mentioned in this policy but also forms part of the framework for responding to breaches of this policy.
Reasonable Adjustments Guidance	This guidance sets our approach to removing barriers for disabled staff. It is mentioned in this policy.
Recruitment and Selection Policy	This is the policy that supports our approach to recruiting and selecting employees. It is mentioned in this policy.
Resolving Volunteer Issues Policy	This is the policy that gives a quick and fair process for addressing concerns or breaches of this policy with volunteers.
Social Media Policy	This is the policy that sets out our expectations of how people should behave when using social media to talk about their work or volunteering for the MS Society.

Appendix 2: document provenance

Date endorsed	Category	Summarise changes made	Reason for changes	Consulted	Changes endorsed by
May 2025	Scheduled review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Addition of 'equity' as well as 'equality' - The characteristics covered by this policy now exceed those within the Equality Act - Five EEDI principles have been introduced to outline how organisational work is led and our expectations for everyone who works with us - This policy applies to volunteers. 	Bring up to date with best practice Better reflect the organisational approach to EEDI	EDI Activity Group EDI Reference Group	Board



Appendix 3: data privacy check list

Screening question:

Does this policy relate to the gathering, processing, storing or the use of personal identifiable information of staff, volunteers, service users or donors; or gathering processing or storing commercially sensitive information (either ours or partner organisations); or altering processes or systems relating to gathering, processing or storing or use of this information?

NO

*If you answered yes to the above screening question **you should complete the data privacy check list**. Please contact the Head of Information Governance for support. Once completed, please include a summary of the outcome here, or 'not relevant' if one has not been completed:*

not relevant

Appendix 4: equality impact assessment

Screening question:

Does this policy or any of its processes have an impact on staff, volunteers, supporters, users of our services or activities or any other people who may come into contact with us?

YES

Equality impact assessment summary:

If you answered yes to the above screening question you will need to complete an equality impact assessment:

Once completed, please include a summary of the EIA here, or 'not relevant' if one has not been completed.

Overall risk rating: 1 (Low likelihood and impact)

Link to completed EqIA

Appendix 5: environmental impact assessment

Screening question:

Does this policy or any of its processes have an impact on the environment e.g. potential change in use of harmful substances; carbon emissions, from the activities.

NO

Appendix 6: Definitions.

Protected characteristics - The nine protected characteristics described in the Equality Act 2010 are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion or belief
- sex
- sexual orientation

Equality targets - These are targets an organisation sets to support them to improve their culture. For example, to improve their diversity and representation and reduce bias and discrimination. Equality targets are not the same as setting or establishing quotas. Quotas involve setting aside a number of jobs only to be filled by a particular group. This restricts the opportunity for other people to fill these positions and would therefore result in unfair or unlawful discrimination.

Reasonable Adjustments - Under anti-discrimination legislation (e.g. Equality Act 2010) employers are required to make reasonable adjustments for disabled staff. This means making changes to a disabled person's environment or the way they work to remove any barriers. This may include, removing physical barriers, providing extra support or flexibility. Further details are set out in our Reasonable Adjustments Guidance.

Vicarious liability - is when an employer could be held responsible if one of their employees discriminates against someone. To prevent this and because it is the right thing to do, employers should take all the reasonable steps to prevent any form of discrimination.

Types of Discrimination: definitions

When we refer to characteristics below, we mean the ones protected by this policy.

Direct Discrimination - Direct discrimination occurs "when someone is put at a disadvantage or treated less favourably because of a protected characteristic". (Acas)

Associative discrimination - This is "discriminating against someone because of their connection with someone who has a protected characteristic or a group of people who has a protected characteristic. Discrimination by association does not apply to the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership." (Acas)

Perceptive discrimination - This is "discriminating against someone of a 'perceived' protected characteristic. For example, thinking someone is a certain age and discriminating against them because of it, when they're not actually that age.

Discrimination by perception does not apply to the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnerships” (Acas)

Indirect discrimination - This is a situation “when a working practice, policy or rule is the same for everyone but has a worse effect on someone because of a ‘protected characteristic’” (Acas). By law (Equality Act 2010), indirect discrimination applies to these protected characteristics: age, disability and gender reassignment however under this policy it applies to all the characteristics set out in its scope.

Harassment - is any unwanted behaviour that violates a person’s dignity or creates an environment for a person that is intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive. Harassment can be a serious one-off incident, repeated behaviours, spoken or written words, imagery, mimicry, jokes or physical behaviour. Lack of intent is not a defence, and you can make a complaint of harassment even if you do not possess the relevant protected characteristic and/or the comments/behaviour are not aimed at you. Serious harassment may also be a hate crime.

Employees and volunteers are also protected from harassment because of perception and association.

Victimisation - occurs “when someone is treated less favourably as a result of being involved with a discrimination or harassment complaint. Ways someone could be victimised include being labelled a troublemaker, being left out or not being allowed to do something” (Acas). Someone could be victimised because they have done or intend to make a complaint of discrimination or harassment, support someone else’s complaint, gather information that might lead to a complaint, act as a witness in a complaint or say something or give evidence that does not support someone else’s complaint.

Acas - the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service. We have used Acas definitions and advice throughout this policy.