

FreeSchools World Literacy Gender Equality Policy

FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY acknowledges the positive contribution of a diverse workforce and is committed to promoting and supporting the principles of gender equity, diversity and flexibility in the workplace.

FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY strives to create a work environment sensitive to gender equity and diversity and working conditions that enable both women and men to achieve a balance between work and other aspects of life.

Equity is generally regarded as a state of fairness and justice. It requires that the specific needs of particular groups are considered separately and acted upon accordingly. The concept of gender equity recognises that women and men have different life experiences, different needs, different levels of power and access to decision making in our society and differing expectations by others. Gender equity strategies recognise that gender leads to different social, economic and political opportunities for women and men.

The principle of equity or fairness holds that each individual has a basic right to compete for employment as one of the opportunities and rewards of our society, subject only to the limits of his or her ability. Gender equity approaches recognise that there are historical and social disadvantages which prevent one sex, often women, from benefiting fully from society's resources including employment.

The concept recognises that women and men have different needs and power structures and that these differences should be identified and addressed by employers in a manner that rectifies imbalance between the sexes. Gender equity strategies seek to achieve fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men, and recognise that different approaches may be required to produce equitable outcomes.

There are continuing traditions of stereotypes and conceptions of what it means to be a woman or a man, which are embedded in systems and practices. Discriminatory practices have resulted in the systematic devaluation of attitudes, activities and abilities ascribed to women. For men, this discrimination has contributed to devaluation of feminized characteristics in males and reinforced the prevalent male stereotype. The equity approach attempts to recognise these differences and address the underlying reasons for these differences.

Equal Employment Opportunity principles remain a legislative requirement ensuring the elimination of discrimination against women, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and people with disabilities. Workplace diversity extends beyond EEO taking on a broader focus where the differences inherent in every employee are valued. Workplace Diversity focuses on the positive contributions all staff can make to a high performing workplace.

Diversity in the workplace has many dimensions. It encompasses age, gender, physical and mental abilities, educational level, working style, socio-economic background, family and personal responsibilities, language, ethnicity, religion, cultural background and sexual orientation. It is a recognition that people bring to the workplace a variety of personal attributes and experiences that can add value to the work of an organisation.

FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY recognises that people – with their diverse abilities, skills, languages, cultures and backgrounds - are our greatest asset. A focus on diversity encourages us to tap into this resource so that we can best meet FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY's objectives.

The need for people to rest, to engage in cultural and recreational activities, to take time with their families and to undertake personal development is considered to be an intrinsic part of the employment relationship. Additionally it must be acknowledged that employees have a

variety of personal responsibilities beyond the workplace which in turn impact upon their lives at work. Changing workforce dynamics, together with the transforming nature of work and technology now mean that issues such as family responsibilities and further study can no longer be ignored.

It is well recognised that flexibility and responsiveness are fundamental to an organisation's longer-term success. A crucial element in this success lies in recognising the valuable contribution employees make toward its achievement.

FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY believes that the advantages and cost benefits in providing flexible work practices include improved retention of volunteers or employees, reductions in recruitment and training costs through lower volunteer or employee turnover, a decrease in absenteeism, improved volunteer or employee morale and reduced stress. These all lead to greater productivity.

In keeping with our commitment to workplace diversity, FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY aims to promote a workplace culture that:

- values and supports individual differences and perspectives;
- incorporates diversity principles across all of our people policies and services – from recruitment and selection through to performance appraisal and career development;
- promotes flexible and responsive work practices;
- is free from discrimination and harassment; and provides all staff with the opportunity to reach their full potential.

GENDER EQUITY AND DIVERSITY

Key points

- Responsibility for the development of a gender equity and diversity culture in the FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY rests with all volunteers and staff
- The diverse backgrounds, skills, talents and views of staff are recognised, encouraged and valued by supervisors and managers.
- Staff are encouraged to recognise and use their life skills and experiences to maximise their individual effectiveness in the workplace and to enhance the quality of their decision making.
- Volunteers and staff are not subject to direct or indirect discrimination, unfair treatment in the workplace, or to workplace harassment.
- FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY aims to ensure that workplace practices provide flexibility for volunteers and staff to balance their work and personal commitments.
- FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY is committed to remedying any employment related disadvantage of current and potential employees in designated groups.
- Volunteers and staff and those seeking employment with FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY receive fair and equitable treatment in staff selection processes and career development opportunities.
- Nomination and selection to delegations, boards and management positions will be based on relative ability, skill, experience and suitability to the position. Where gender imbalance exists and the qualifications, skills, experience and suitability of the candidates is comparable, additional weight will be given to gender balance in the final decision.
- Supervisors are encouraged to focus on the diverse backgrounds and skills of their volunteers and staff and to draw on and develop these qualities in the workplace.
- Volunteers and staff are encouraged to acknowledge and draw on their diverse backgrounds, skills and talents.

It is hoped that through FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY's workplace policies delivered through a process of consultation and cooperation, these arrangements will extensively assist in the career development of volunteers and employees and provide a model that will assist in the promotion of similar positive working arrangements in the NGO sector.

This Gender Equality Policy was adopted by FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY Committee of Management in February 2010 and its interpretation and application will be discussed at least annually in an appropriate forum.

An amendment was made to this Policy in April 2011 (8th bullet point in *Gender Equity and Diversity*). The amendment was adopted by FREESCHOOLS WORLD LITERACY Committee of Management on 19th April 2011 at its 26th Meeting.